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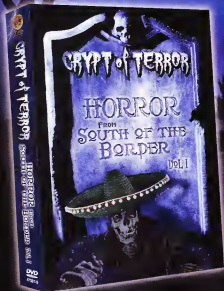
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RUE MORGUE

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HOME, SWEET HOMICIDE

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Considered unfilmable due to its unapologetic portrayal of child abuse, Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door* premieres on DVD this month in a punishing adaptation that exposes the nasty underbelly of 1950s lollipop America. Interviews with director Gregory M. Wilson, leads Blanche Baker and Blythe Auffarth, screenwriters Daniel Farrands and Philip Nelson and more! by Monica S. Kuchler and Shade Rupe

THE BLACK BIBLE OF BAVA

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Thirty-two years in the making, Tim Lucas' 1128-page *All the Colors of the Dark* reigns supreme as the ultimate tome on Mario Bava. Plus: Anchor Bay's Bava Box Vol. 2 reviewed. by Kier-La Janisse and Jason Pichonsky

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We invite you to leer at the sinful creations of Hammer Studios' signature poster painter. by James Burrell

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Note From Underground



Grief. You never see it coming. And when it strikes its cataclysmic blow, it does so with the sharpest of blades. One of its greatest strengths is its ability to beat you down and keep you there, catatonically occupied by the blackest thoughts, so devastating for some that even death transforms into salvation in their wounded eyes. Terrifying, those thoughts. But when you're weak and in the midst of suffering, the rolling sheets of pain that come with it are quickened by even the simplest of breezes. In this place, the sky is always its greyest, the rain of sadness it brings endless, and even the birds seem to sing nothing but lonely death dirges. A winter of bleak feelings rolls in, bringing with it hopelessness, desolation, regret, remorse, anguish and unparalleled gloom, until love lies bleeding and you're a miserable, prostrated mess.

I have just lost someone who was very dear to me and I find it difficult to write because I am weathering an overwhelming storm of loss. At this moment I feel devastating pain for things said and done, for things unfinished and unrequited, and for what I see as my own personal failure to help someone see life for what it's really worth. That is what grief is and how it operates. It doesn't let you sleep, eat or feel anything else. It just takes and takes and takes until you have nothing left for it to take.

Where do we find solace and joy when we are overcome by such inconsolable misery? They say most people eventually find it within themselves – somewhere, beyond the dense shadows cast by grief. However, when you're in the throes of grieving, finding strength within yourself is like trying to escape from prison armed with nothing but wishful thinking.

Pain is universal, it's why people write horror stories and make horror films. We tend to put all the emphasis on "fear" when telling such stories. It's really a buzzword, though, because fear is just a precursor to pain. That's what we're all really so frightened of.

While brooding over this month's cover story, an agonizing film called *Jack Ketchum's The Girl Next Door*, and wondering if there was even a connection between it and what I've been feeling, I realized this editorial perfectly befits it. After watching the movie at home alone one night for the second time, with the full understanding that it's based on grievous crimes that were committed against sixteen-year-old Sylvia Marie Likens back in 1965, I was once again overwhelmed by that familiar, soul-crushing, happiness-robbing, punishing, hideous heart: grief.

The Girl Next Door is best described as a "feel bad movie" – a *Stand by Me*-like period piece that effectively begins on a tender moment of childhood innocence and ends with the complete rape and robbery of it – all too real and insufferably painful to watch. Because of its controversial subject matter ("The Girl" in question is imprisoned and tortured by her female guardian, who manipulates and coerces several neighbourhood children to go along with it), some say *The Girl Next Door* is an irresponsible film, one that could perhaps have been more thoughtful.

But I believe it achieves its purpose, which is to forcibly permit us to see behind closed doors and gaze upon the ugliness that's sometimes there, to make us remember (as much as we'd like not to) what happened to Sylvia Marie Likens, and to respect the strength and resolve this young girl possessed while enduring a level of hell most of us could never imagine.

It's been far too long since a film made me feel anything at all, not the least of which an emotion as profound as grief. Given everything I've been going through, I'm glad it came along when it did. If anything, watching the movie only made me feel worse. At first, then, somehow, I began to feel... better. Reliving someone else's tragedy and suffering wasn't exactly what I thought I needed to help snap me out of this horrific fugue state, but ironically it worked because I finally began to appreciate something I've heard frequently within the context of grief that now makes perfect sense: sometimes it takes understanding the pain of others before we can better understand and cope with our own. It's truer than I thought.

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DESIGN BY GARY PULLIN

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Post Mortem

QUESTIONS • COMMENTS • CRITICISM

CONGRATULATIONS on the 10th anniversary issue, probably one of the best issues of a horror magazine I've ever read. I particularly enjoyed the history of *Rue Morgue* article as a relatively new reader and it's great to see the magazine still achieves (and exceeds) what Mr. Giallo set out to do. I also liked the article on the history of [General Mills] horror cereal boxes – where else can you read about such things? Keep up the terrific work and be proud that your dream of a magazine that celebrates horror culture has reached across continents and is now an essential part of my horror collection.

Matt Roberts – Canberra, Australia

I WAS COMPELLED to pick up your 10th anniversary issue for the following reasons: Clive Barker (one of the best writers of any genre), who has inspired me to keep writing, *The Thing* (one of the best horror films ever made) and black metal, the ultimate bastard genre of music. Also, the articles on cereal mascots and *Spider Baby* proved to be quirky reads. Of course, the origin of *RM* is also enthralling. I commend the staff on the design and content, which is always intriguing and far better than that of its competitors.

Scott Lesperance – Albany, New York

AS A FORMER journalist and long-time fan of FX wizards great and small, it was pure delight to stumble across Jovanika's interview with Rob Bottin in your 10th Anniversary issue. *The Thing* is my all-time favourite horror movie for many reasons: Kurt Russell's MacReady, the schingly real paranoia and monster-child Rob Bottin's delicious mad scientist warping of human and animal bodies. Imagine my surprise after assimilating this issue, to find that Jovanika's excellent conversation with Mr. Bottin not only recaptures the playful, wry and talented FX wizard as I remembered him, but makes me feel like I'm sitting in on a reunion between two old friends. Rob is a joy to watch and read when he's allowed to give full reign to his unbridled imagination, so I thank you Jovanika for bringing this under-appreciated talent back to the forefront.

**Kimberly ("Sibe Thing") August
– New York, New York**

THANK YOU for an overdue huge article on the best monster film of all time: *The Thing*. I cannot even begin to tell you how I miss Rob Bottin's work and was desperately hoping that he'd mention any upcoming work when you spoke to him.

Stephan – address withheld

BIG THANKS to Rod for his retrospective look at ten years of *Rue Morgue*. Beyond the insight he gave into this incredible magazine, he also made me realize what an amazing group of people we have here in Toronto. As far as sub-cultures go, the horror community here in Toronto is something really special, comprised of, in my opinion, some of the most down-to-earth, passionate and dedicated people I've ever met. And if you read between the lines of Rod's article, I really think it casts a light on that, and the people who are a part of it should be proud that we live in the city where *Rue Morgue*, CineMacabre, Festival of Fear, etc. can thrive.

Nathan Gormley – Toronto, Ontario

RUE MORGUE has long been one of my favourite magazines and my definite go-to source to satiate all my horror cravings. I must point out, however, that the last couple of issues have also satiated another forgotten thirst: the *fun* of horror. With the articles on monster cereal and monster-based board and card games, a wave of nostalgia washed over me and I found myself smiling with fond memories and reading with great interest. Thanks again *Rue Morgue* for rising to the top and filling a need I didn't even know I had.

Christopher Hicks – La Plata, Maryland

JAMES BURRELL did a great article on monster cereals. I really enjoyed looking back on them. I am an artist and do freelance illustration and got the honour to do the latest Boo Berry cereal box that ran last year and this year. Sadly they are not as popular as they used to be (got a feeling it has something to do with the sugar) but it still was a lot of fun to work on something that played a huge part in my childhood.

**Brent Schoonover
– somewhere in Minnesota**

AS A HUGE GAMER, I am very disappointed with the Play Dead section. I'm naïve about the whole magazine writing thing but I do know that you write things much before it hits newsstands. However, many of the games reviewed are pretty out of date for an industry that is pumping out so many. Secondly, the choice of games seems very poor to me. But the games reviewed wasn't what bothered me most about the whole section, though, it was the games not reviewed, the things left unsaid, and, mostly, the consoles skipped over. I know your magazine is not a gaming magazine and it is devoted to horror but the small one-page section left so many things unsaid that could have been there in a big 10th anniversary issue.

Corey Pagett – address withheld

I MUST TAKE ISSUE with the letter from Richard Reeves, who, when discussing female serial killers, dismisses Aileen Wuornos because of her sexuality. The tragedy of her victims and her own upbringing should not be ignored because she's "just a lesbian."

Murray Lothian – Bonnyrigg, Scotland

THANK YOU [Jovanika] for being so cordial to me at the Rock and Shock convention. It was an honour to meet you, and in truth you were my favourite person that I met at the show. You were cooler, more honest and more real than any of the other guests there. It was great to see that after all the icons of horror you've met and interviewed over the years that you are still a fan first and treated me with the utmost kindness. That care and dedication to your readers, mixed with your intense editorials and knowledgeable articles/interviews is why I will never let my subscription run out.

**Michael Welch
– Worcester, Massachusetts**



Dreadlines

News Highlights



Horror Happenings

Zombies, evil twins and a hungry car premiere at TADFF '07

Running for seven days at the legendary Bloor Cinema – from October 19 to 25 – the Toronto After Dark Film Festival saw attendance rise over 51 percent last year with the draw of more Canadian premieres. Highlights included an opening night presentation of acclaimed rat-zombie film *Mulberry Street* (RMM69), which took the Toronto After Dark Spirit Award, a sold out showing of Lloyd Kaufman's fast food industry-assault *Poultrygeist* (RMM73) and a closing night screening of the wildly splatterific *Murder Party* (see p 39), making this year's Toronto After Dark lineup every bit as much bloodthirsty fun as the festival's highly celebrated 2006 inaugural run. *Rue Morgue* got a sneak peek at a few titles destined for instant cult classic status, and perhaps one or two doomed to the delete-bin.

ALONE

Thailand

Directed by Banjong Pisanthanakun
and Parkpoom Wongpoom.
Canadian Premiere

The same team that brought us *Shutter* (the naughty little chiller that transformed a 2005 FanTasia audience into 800 jumping beans) traverse similar terrain with this sublimely crafted tale of a formerly conjoined twin who's haunted by frequent apparitions of her jealous, deceased sister. An unfortunate plot twist in the final act sucks a lot of energy out of an otherwise highly effective supernatural shocker. While it's not quite as intense as its predecessor, it still showcased plenty of choice jolts that brought the Toronto After Dark audience repeatedly to the thresholds of cardiac arrest, and it scooped the festival's newly created Audience Choice Award in the process.



Automotive Transfusion: An indie zombie effort that premiered in conjunction with the Toronto Zombie Walk.

AUTOMATION TRANSFUSION

USA

Directed by Steven C. Miller
Canadian Premiere

With the annual Toronto Zombie Walk happening in conjunction with the festival, one assumes that in terms of quality, the demand for zombie films exceeds the supply. This may explain the inclusion of *Automation Transfusion* in this year's lineup. In this dreadfully unimaginative plundering of *28 Days Later*, a viral outbreak sees hordes of running fiends hell-bent on

chomping on a gang of retarded teenyboppers. Sure, there's gut-munching carnage, but with its non-stop strobe effects and a wall-to-wall jock rock soundtrack, this brainless bastardization is for non-discriminating zombie movie completists only.

BLOOD CAR

USA

Directed by Alex Orr
Canadian Premiere

The only midnight screening in this year's program was everything a midnight movie should be: a fiercely irreverent

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bloodbath of sexual perversity that violates all standards of good taste. Set in the not-too-distant future where gasoline has become ridiculously expensive, *Blood Car* is essentially Roger Corman's *The Little Shop of Horrors*, but instead of feeding a giant plant to make it grow, the protagonist fills his car with human blood to make it go. Powered by an endless supply of inventive weirdness, this flick never runs out of fuel (unlike the titular hemoglobin-guzzling vehicle itself).

IN THE NAME OF THE KING: A DUNGEON SIEGE TALE

Germany/Canada/USA
Directed by Uwe Boll
Toronto Premiere

One of the surprising high points this year was the in-person appearance by the always entertaining Teutonic Terror himself, Dr. Uwe Boll. His latest video game adaptation is an ultra-violent \$63 million sword 'n' sorcery epic starring Jason Statham as a farmer (named, ironically, Farmer) on a quest to destroy the evil wizard responsible for sending the Krugs (think poor man's Ores) that killed his family. With decent performances from John Rhys-Davies, Ron Perlman and Kristanna Loken and unspeakably miscast appearances by Ray Laotto (outrageously over-the-top as the aforementioned wizard), *Scooby Doo*'s Matthew Lillard and Bart Reynolds(!), *In the Name of the King* is a maddeningly long, occasionally amusing, bona fide train wreck of genre stars. Somehow in the mad German's insane mental processes, though, it all makes perfect sense.

NIGHTMARE DETECTIVE

Japan
Directed by Shinya Tsukamoto
Toronto Premiere

In his latest offering from the director of the industrial-horror cult classic *Tetsuo: The Iron Man*, a detective suspects that a serial killer is mysteriously offing people in their sleep. She enlists the services of a man capable of transporting himself into others' dreams to help her solve the case. Although



stylistically conventional by the standards of Tsukamoto's earlier work, the disturbing sound design and occasional flying camera moves frequently remind us that it's the same filmmaker who coigned up the insanely frenetic *Tetsuo*. It doesn't quite exploit the full possibilities of its premise but it's an absorbing slow-burn that plays out like a mesmerizing Japanese art house riff on a Freddy Krueger flick.

SIMON SAYS

USA
Directed by William Dear
Canadian Premiere

In this entry for slasher fans, a gaggle of unbearably dumb college kids embark upon an ill-fated camping trip only to wind up as forest fodder for the murderous exploits of Simon and Stanley, a couple of nut-job hill-billy twins – both played by Crispin Glover.



A murder victim in Shinya Tsukamoto's latest genre offering, *Nightmare Detective* (above) and (below) *Simon Says*, a new slasher film starring Crispin Glover

While the audience responded favourably to the eccentric actor's scenery chewing, in truth, he phoned in a very forgettable performance. But it's not entirely his fault. The script is pitiful and the only things keeping this lame duck afloat are the gruesome kills (featuring flying pickaxes!) and the fact that as each college kid bites the dust, we can relax knowing that it's one less blithering twit we'll have to endure. *Simon Says*: avoid this one like poison oak.

More information on the Toronto After Dark Film Festival at torontoafterdark.com

Stuart Andrews

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Dreadlines

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sleepingbeauty2.com

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fatrockcommand.com

In the months following a zombie plague that wiped out most of the Earth's population, pockets of survivors are clustered in military bases studying the flesh-munchers, devising better ways to kill them and working on a cure to their deadly bite. Use their notes and video transmissions to follow the Apocalypse story.

kindertrauma.com

Finally! A site where we can reflect on all those things that scared us shifless as kids, from movie moments and book covers, to terrifying toys and truly disturbing artwork. Overseen by Uncle Lancelot and Aunt John, Kindertrauma also catalogs creepy children in horror films and invites users to submit their own "traumafessions." What are you waiting for?

bloodtypesonline.com

When it comes to getting genre news, horror fans are a very lucky bunch indeed, with many "not options to choose from. Among them, Bloodtype Online, which covers both film and literature, and offers a variety of news, features, audio interviews and reviews, as well as a weekly podcast.

adultswim.com/games/evilinforce/

Date working in an office make you want to off yourself? Now you can — virtually. In this gory game from Teletoon's Adult Swim, you are given five minutes to kill yourself using only office supplies and your innate ability to annoy your co-workers.



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MPI/Dark Sky produces first feature with *Plague Town*

Adding to the growing trend of DVD distribution companies taking the plunge into film production (others include Mondo Macabro and Uncut), Chicago-based MPI/Dark Sky recently wrapped its first feature, *Plague Town*, about a family on a road trip across the Irish countryside that happens upon a town occupied by homicidal, deformed children is directed by veteran genre documentary filmmaker David Gregory, who has nearly 100 docs to his credit including *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Shocking Truth and Portrait: The Making of "Henry"*. The low-budget feature had its genesis back in 2000, while Gregory was still making films as special features for DVD imprints Dark Sky Films and Blue Underground.

"I wrote a short film called *Come Out and Play* in 2000 and it was basically the mid-section of this movie," Gregory tells *Rue Morgue* while on the remote Connecticut set of his first feature, which was co-written with John Cregan from Blue Underground.

The screenplay was finally complete in 2003, after Gregory moved to Dark Sky permanently to create DVD documentaries for the company, including *The Manson Family* and *Dan O'Bannon: Crafting Fear*. There, he passed the script on to [producer and Dark Sky topper] Greg Newman. Having been interested in moving into film production for some time, Newman jumped at the opportunity after he read the unique script.

"There aren't enough killer children movies out there," says Gregory. "There's obviously *Village of the Damned* and *Who Can Kill a Child?* — good ones, but there aren't enough that involve a marauding gang of violent children. If you've ever spent time in a kindergarten class — where my wife was teaching for a while — it's a pretty terrifying thing. To exaggerate that and make it violent is not so far from reality."

With all the mutated children running around in the film ravenously seeking blood for some unknown purpose, it was no surprise that Gregory's biggest influence for his malformed killer kids movie was David Cronenberg's *The Brood*.

"There is indeed a Cronenbergian angle to *Plague Town*, which involves the body," he admits. "You're not sure what's happening because it's never fully explained what the plague victims are stricken with, it's more like a genetic disorder in this isolated town. To the parents, they're beautiful, to them they're perfectly okay. That's how the people of this village are; there's nothing wrong with their children."

Stylistically, the film, shot on Super-16mm, will capture the grainy aesthetic of '70s American horror, which Gregory cut his teeth on growing up during the Video Nasties era in Britain. But he's also being careful to sidestep the overdone survivalist horror revival (*Wrong Turn*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* remake, *The Hills Have Eyes* remake and *Wolf Creek*).

"Because that hunt has sailed, I wanted to do something that was a bit different from that, something that was actually cleaner," he explains. "That's why I wanted to set it in a cold climate, and [have] people live in very clean houses; they're not full of rusty instruments, body parts and things like that. I wanted to take that convention of people lost in a rural place and kind of twist it the other way a little bit."

For the task, Gregory has assembled a cast of fresh faces, including Josselyn DeCrista, Erica Rhodes, David Lombard and makeup FX designer Tate Steinsiek (*Zombie Honeyman*, *Knock, Knock*). And while the director maintains the "gore in the film is not pushing the envelope in terms of graphic violence," Steinsiek is somewhat more enthusiastic.

"My hands are stained red from all the blood we've used!" he beams, while holding a gruesome shotgun-blast-to-the-head prop. "I've already used more blood in this film than probably all of my other films. I've only killed one kid before this, I'm going to kill, like, fifteen children in this movie!"

Plague Town is expected to tour festivals next year, with a late 2008 release.

Jovanka Vuckovic



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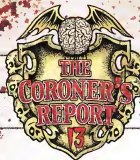
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Weird Stats Morbid Facts

- ✦ In 1883, when there was a job opening for a hangman in England, over 1400 people applied for the position.
- ✦ In occupied France during WWII, one of the most popular forms of entertainment for Nazi officers was attending Grand Guignol performances.
- ✦ It takes 240th of a second for a human body to be rendered unconscious during an electrocution in an electric chair.
- ✦ During the height of her popularity as TV's first horror host, Vampira (Marta Numa) regularly hit the town with close friend and then-struggling actor James Dean. After his death, the press played up the morbid connection between them, dubbing her the "Black Madonna."
- ✦ American Michael Mastrorillo stands accused of illegally harvesting bone and tissue from more than 1000 corpses that were awaiting burial or cremation at funeral homes, as well as falsifying medical records of disease victims in order to make their limbs, etc. saleable for transplant.
- ✦ Dominique Dunne (*Polygraph*) was strangled on Nov. 4, 1982, by her abusive ex-boyfriend; she is buried in Westwood Memorial Park in Los Angeles, CA near Heather O'Rourke, her *Polygraph* co-star who succumbed to intestinal stenosis in 1988.
- ✦ Hypertrichosis, a medical condition in which people grow unnaturally thick hair on most or all of their bodies, is also known as "werewolf syndrome."
- ✦ Gorecore group Cannibal Corpse made a cameo appearance in 1994's *Ace Ventura: Pet Detective*. The film's star, Jim Carrey, is apparently a fan of the band. In the closing credits, however, they are incorrectly credited as "Cannibal Corpses."
- ✦ William Calcraft worked as a hangman for 45 years from 1829 to 1874 in London, England. He holds the record for the longest amount of time spent in that profession.
- ✦ Director José Mojica Marins (best known for the Coffin Joe films) was expelled from Catholic school at age thirteen for making a film depicting extraterrestrials launching an invasion of Earth and killing priests.
- ✦ As Latin American rain forests are being cut down to create farmland, vampire bats driven out of their natural habitats have begun feasting on the cattle of local farmers.
- ✦ The first Filipino "talkie" was a horror film: Magilla Talkatone's *Ang Arawang* (1933).
- ✦ According to Michael Ghiglieri and Thomas Myers, authors of *Over the Edge: Death in Grand Canyon*, 53 people accidentally plunged to their deaths in the Grand Canyon between 1925 and 2005.

Compiled by Monica S. Koehler
Get a weird stat or morbid fact?
Send it through to monica@true.morgue.com.

The Rue Morgue SICK TOP SIX



Instances of POSSESSED POSSESSIONS



1. **Black Roses**
Dad-eating devil speaker
2. **Evilspeak**
Satanic green screen
3. **The Mangler**
Laundry press of peril
4. **Death Bed: The Bed That Eats**
Under-cover carnivore
5. **Evil Dead II**
Ludicrous laughing lamp
6. **The Car**
Hell on wheels



DISCOVER DISCOVER DARKNESS DARK HORSE

THE EVIL DEAD



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- MARQUIS magazine

CONSIDERED UNFILMABLE DUE TO ITS UNAPOLOGETIC PORTRAYAL OF CHILD ABUSE, JACK KETCHUM'S *THE GIRL NEXT DOOR* PREMIERES ON DVD THIS MONTH IN A TERRIFYING ADAPTATION THAT EXPOSES THE NASTY UNDERBELLY OF 1950s LOLLIPOP AMERICA.



In the last five years, torture porn has crafted a veritable cottage industry of human suffering and mutilation, glorifying graphic person-on-person violence in order to titillate and entertain the-bereaved. Its "victims" have been largely objectified into meaty set pieces, often served up with gratuitous helpings of softcore sexual binks and cartoonish violence that's full of a kind of schoolyard "I can shock you more!" one-upmanship between directors such as Eli Roth (*Halloween*), Darren Lynn Bousman (*Saw II, III and IV*) and Rob Zombie. But now comes the antidote: Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door*, a film that explores the human element of torture as it captures the unforgettable abuse waged upon one teenage girl. And unlike many contemporary horror films which falsely purport to be "based on a true story" just to get butts into theatre seats, these atrocities really happened.

At *Rue Morgue*, we've always been very aware of the difference between entertainment and what happens in real life. As such, we tend to avoid true crime sensationalizing yet indulge in fictionalized accounts of those crimes as they are in essence one person's artistic expression of his or her thoughts about the case. In terms of cruelty, bloodshed and sheer human depravity, many real crimes trump anything horror directors could possibly splatter across the silver screen. So it's no surprise that mass murderers

and serial killers have long provided fertile fodder for horror films; Ed Gein served as the loose inspiration for *The Taxidermy Addict*, *Messiah* and *Deranged*; Henry: Portrait of a Serial Killer was based on the confessions of Henry Lee Lucas, and Jim VanBebber's *The Manson Family* captured a graphic re-enactment of Charles Manson's brutal deeds, to name a few.

Now, *The Girl Next Door* ventures into similar terrain – a difficult to categorize gray area between "horror" and "drama." The film's director, genre newsmonger Gregory M. Wilson, calls it "social horror," as the film deals neither in the supernatural nor in exploitation, instead striving to be an authentic adaptation of a novel based on a horrific real-world crime. It's a story once believed unfilmable due to its young female victim and the fact that the abuse was not just perpetrated by her female adult guardian, but by many of the neighbourhood children at the woman's deranged behest.

The actual case made national headlines in 1965 when the beaten, burned, branded and emaciated body of sixteen-year-old Sylvia Marie Likens was discovered in a rundown Indianapolis home after a child anonymously reported her death.

The subsequent trial became one of Indiana's most sensational, particularly when it was revealed that Sylvia's 37-year-old guardian Gertrude Banzisewski had not acted alone but had coerced a group of children (includ-



“IF YOU ASK A CHILD TO DRAW A MONSTER...THEY ARE NEVER GOING TO PAINT YOU THE POLICEMAN, THE MOTHER, THE FATHER, THE POLICEMAN, THE NEIGHBOUR, THE PRIEST — WHO ARE IN ESSENCE THE REAL-LIFE MONSTERS.”
—**EGOR M. WILSON** ♥

ing their own sons and daughters), some as young as eleven, to participate in the abuse. Litvins had not been with the Banikowski family four months when her corpse was removed from their home. Following the trial, the Banikowski residence became known as the local haunted house. (It had a high turnover of occupants until it was purchased in 2003 to be turned into a women's shelter.)

Several books have been written about or inspired by the case. Jack Kerchman's 1989 novel, *The Girl Next Door* (RMMZ) is the most famous in genre circles. Like the crime itself, his national but responsibly faithful retelling of the events makes for one of the most brutal, stomach-turning horror novels in recent memory, partly because the author sets his tale several years earlier and casts one of the twelve-year-old accomplices as the narrator, David. (Another film based on trial transcripts from the case, *An*

American Crime, is planned for a summer 2008 release — see p.72.)

For his film adaptation (just December 4, from Anchor Bay/Story), Wilson also drew inspiration from a more recent NYC child abuse crime: the Nozmary Brown case, in which the accused mothers/murderers were the young girl's parents. This is why, despite the myriad challenges that come with making a graphic film about child abuse, Wilson persevered. He firmly believes that these sorts of unfathomable crimes need to be exposed, even if the general public would rather remain ignorant. As a result, his film is powerful, infuriating, traumatic and, quite frankly, difficult to sit through.

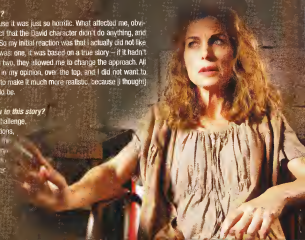
Rue Morgue investigates the human factor with Wilson, screenwriters David Ferrands and Philip Nulman (p.20), and cast members Blanche Baker (p.19) and Blythe Aulrich (p.21), as they contemplate what turns seemingly normal people into monsters.

What was your initial reaction to Jack Kerchman's novel?

I had to put the book down and then come back to it because it was just so horrific. What affected me, obviously, was the story, and I actually got very angry at the fact that the David character didn't do anything, and yet you have to understand that he's only twelve-years-old. So my initial reaction was that I actually did not like it because it was just so strong. But my reason for doing it was one, it was based on a true story — if it hadn't been based on that I don't think I would have done it — and two, they allowed me to change the approach. All the other filmmakers wanted to make it very graphic and, in my opinion, over the top, and I did not want to approach it that way. I wanted to humanize [Ruth], I wanted to make it much more realistic, because [I thought] the more realistic I can make it, the more believable it would be.

What is it about the true crime genre that attracted you to this story?

A couple of things. One, it was definitely going to be a challenge. We're working with kids so there were all types of limitations, legal and otherwise. But, primarily, in New York we had the Nozmary Brown case. Nozmary Brown was a little girl who was killed at the hands of the people who were supposed to protect her and love her the most. Often times when you hear



What Happens in The Movie: Blanche Baker turns in a chilling performance as the sadistic Ruth Chandler, and below Blythe Aulrich plays Meg, the tortured innocent in the story.



Too Little Too Late: →? / Liaa Manóvil tries to comfort Meg.

about these extreme child abuse cases, you only hear the aftermath, you only hear what the abuse was; that she was burned or she was raped, she was cut and starved, and all these things. But you never hear about the lead up to the crime, you never hear about the elements that affected the psychology of the individual or of the family in that case, and in this case, to me it was definitely a group psychology. It wasn't just one person inflicting this damage to this girl, it was several.

Why do you think Likens crime occurred? Was it a product of its era?

Back in the '50s and '60s when the actual case happened, America was going through that regeneration post-World War II. There was that rebirth of America, so there was a lot of innocence. It came from the suburbs, barring the occasional hero in the morning and picking up your newspaper and taking out the garbage, you really don't know what happens next door. You really don't know what people do in the privacy of their own homes, and that's what this — to me — really shows. On the outside this family could look perfectly normal, middle-class, suburban. You could not tell by any stretch of the imagination that there is something wrong, and that really happened. I do think this stuff happens more often than we think.

How did you approach the subject matter?

For me, it was an opportunity to make a film that shows the process. We all know the answer, but let me show you the question that led up to that answer. It shows the degeneration of the family and the mother and so on. If anything, I wanted to increase people's vocabulary about this type of abuse, because we've all heard of these stories, but we really never know

what led up to it. I think that's what really attracted me. As a matter of fact, I remember when we were getting our rating, we actually got an R-rating — barely — from the board. It was almost a split decision, one of the representatives told me, between NC17 and R, and she told me that the reason that she voted R was that she honestly believed that a film like this should be seen, for very much the same reasons that I mentioned.

This movie must have been very difficult to cast.

Looking back, the only major element that we had to change is that in the book Meg was around twelve-years-old. You can write that in a book and there's no problem because you're just writing, but when we had to make the film we ran into all kinds of problems. There were going to be legal issues, there were going to be child labour issues, issues with the Screen Actors Guild. You have to walk that balance between serving the story and then protecting your child actors. So one of the things we did was make Meg eighteen because that allowed us legal leeway to go things. If we'd kept her twelve we would have [had to] water the film down too much and I don't think that would have served the story. When I say "making her eighteen," I mean we cast her at the age of eighteen — in the film I never mention her age, I pretty much let the audience decide how old she is, as long as they understand that she's an innocent victim and that she's young. And casting for the kids, one of the things we did was, we really cast the parents. I had to meet with the parents and talk to them and really see where they were. You know: "Why would you want your child to do this kind of film? Tell me what your stances are?" And that's really how

we ended up finding our cast. First we found the right actors, then we found the right parents — so that the parents understood my vision, I needed the parents to trust me and I needed the kids to trust me. I had to make sure that they were mature enough to handle some of the material and I also had to make sure the parents understood what I was doing.

What were some of the changes you made to the original script?

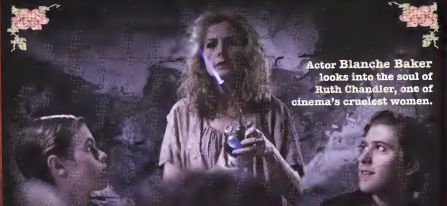
Originally [the screenwriters] had Ruth with blisters and stuff on her face, things that would really make her look like a monster. I said, "Well, I don't think that's necessary, to me she doesn't have to look like a monster. It's about what she does, not necessarily how she looks." So I changed that completely. I said, "No, she's going to be an attractive older woman, mother of three, who on the outside, you can't see anything." What they originally wanted to do was have those physical manifestations come later on and I didn't think they were necessary. My approach was more that we're going to change her look subtly, we're going to make it so that it will make sense with her behaviour. In the morning she had a lot of time, and took her time to do her hair and makeup. Well, as the degeneration progresses, she's going to have less time, she's going to drink more. So if she's going to have less time and drink more and do more things, then her hair's going to be down, her makeup's going to be more flat, she's going to look a little more tired, a little more gaunt, eyes more sunken.

Are you a horror fan?

I am. I grew up on horror. I'm a cinema fan. To me some of my favourite films were the horror films. I grew up with the *Halloween*s, with *Friday*, *Knight Rider*. You know, those are classic. I think John Carpenter's *The Thing* was one of my favourite ones, even though that's kind of a mixture between *Alien* and horror — and *Body snatchers*. Growing up I was exposed to a lot of it.

Do you think your exposure to all these horror films affected the way you approached this project?

That's a good question. Again, with those films in particular, pretty much with almost all of those, the horror element is fantastical. It is very "this is your worst nightmare"-based. These are the horror films that happen in your dreams. This one, to me, was a real-life one, so I had to make it as real as possible. If you ask a child to draw a monster, they are going to draw you a monster with eight legs and tentacles and missing one eye and an eye patch and jagged teeth. They are never going to paint you the postman, the mother, the father, the policeman, the next door neighbour, the priest — who are in essence the real-life monsters. With the



Actor Blanche Baker
looks into the soul of
Ruth Chandler, one of
cinema's cruellest women.

SUBURBAN SADIST

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

As far as malevolent matriarchs go, *Friday* the 13th's Pamela Voorhees, *Carrie*'s Margaret White and *The Brood*'s Nora Carverth have nothing on *The Girl Next Door*'s Ruth Chandler. Portrayed by Blanche Baker, Ruth is calm, cool and calculating, even as she imprisons one of her teenage wards and orchestrates the girl's sexual humiliation, rape and brutal torture. She's an absolute monster, and worse: the character, adapted from Jack Ketchum's book, is based on real-life abuser Gertrude Baniszewski.

Life has been unkind to the single mother, a functional alcoholic who already has a house full of kids when she takes in the orphaned Meg and her crippled younger sister, Jenny. Ruth takes an instant disliking to Meg and sees it as her responsibility to set the girl straight. But that too, quickly sours and soon Ruth and the gaggle of neighbourhood teens she presides over declare open season on destroying the girl, mind, body and soul.

"She really felt that this girl was out of control," Baker says of Ruth's reasoning. "She was a single mother back then when it was certainly not smiled upon. And I think she snapped. This teenage girl arriving with her sister, [when] she already had these three young boys, I think it just pushed her over the edge. ... I think in her mind, it began as disciplining her and that this girl was really corrupt and ruining their lives."

Despite her spot-on, bone-chilling performance, Baker is an unusual choice for the character, as her resume boasts a long list of comedic roles and guest spots on mainstream TV dramas such as *Law and Order* and *In the Heat of the Night*, but nary a horror film.

"[When] I was called in for the audition, I hadn't actually read the script," she confesses. "I probably wouldn't have gone on the first audition if I'd read something other than the sides that were first sent to me."

She adds, "I think that I trusted [director] Greg [Wilson] because he'd spoken to me about it earlier, he'd worked with me on the first audition and I

could see what his vision was for the project, that it wasn't going to be exploitation."

Wilson had very specific ideas for Baker's character. First and foremost, Ruth needed to be portrayed believably. In order to achieve this, he changed certain portions of the script that had originally called for her appearance to be more monstrous. Both Baker and Wilson agreed from the onset of the project that the key to the capturing Ruth authentically was to make her descent into utter depravity a subtle one.

"I really think the scariest thing is when people aren't screaming, when they're just saying things very casually," explains Baker. "That's what Anthony Hopkins did in *Silence of the Lambs*; when people are speaking quite eloquently and calmly and saying these things, it's much scarier than if they're actually screaming and you can see that they're lunatics."

As a result, Ruth's physical and mental deterioration in the film coincide with the gradually escalating abuse of Meg. At the onset, Ruth appears hardened and world-weary but not entirely unattractive. However, as her depravity evolves and threatens to consume her, the facade crumbles. Her makeup becomes more garish, her hair dishevelled, and that evil serpentine smile all the more pronounced. Facial features that were cold and hard before, become downright sinister, yet still realistic.

The ugly facade is merely a hint of the true grotesqueness at the character's core, however. Ruth's ability to manipulate children to exploit other children, without seeing the wrong in their actions, is one of the most traumatizing aspects of *The Girl Next Door*, and what makes the character one of the most villainous matriarchs ever brought to the screen.

"I think it's the idea that she got kids to do it to kids, and that's the twist," explains Baker. "That's the thing that also hasn't been seen that often in film. That manipulation is the true evil." ❧

Screenwriters Daniel Farrands
and Philip Nutman on...

ADAPTING THE UNFILMABLE

"This is the most horrible, offensive, disgusting thing I've ever read!" screamed producer Don Murphy (*Natural Born Killers*) upon rejecting the screenplay for Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door*.

Daniel Farrands (*Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers*), one half of the film's screenwriting team, recalls, "Don told me that no one would ever make this film and that I should just take the script and bury it. I guess I should thank him. His reaction only strengthened my resolve to get the movie made."

Producers weren't the only ones who needed convincing to become involved with the project. Farrands even had to talk his co-writer, accomplished horror novelist Philip Nutman (*Wet Work*), into it.

"The truth is, Dan badgered me to write the script with him," says Nutman, a long-time friend of Ketchum's, who had earlier written an essay on the story, and eventually also co-produced the film. "I did not want to ever return to the basement of the Chandler house."

Farrands elaborates: "Everything the reviews had said was true. This was the most incisive, cruel, heartbreaking and uncommercial book I had ever read. That's when I knew it had to be made into a movie."

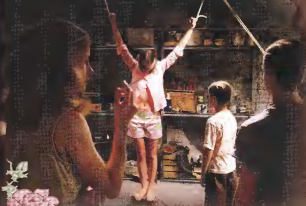
The film, which was written years before the "torture porn" trend, caused the duo to do some serious soul-searching to ensure their faithful adaptation wouldn't be exploitive.

"We never had any desire or inclination to glamorize or trivialize the torture scenes," affirms Farrands.

Since the book was always considered unfilmable, not even Ketchum himself believed that the pair could pull it off, remarking publicly that he was certain they'd fail. Although the ending of the film diverges slightly from that of the book, the author was pleasantly surprised with the outcome.

"Jack and I are very proud of the film," says Nutman. "I never, ever expected this script to be filmed, and I certainly never expected us to get an R rating. Period. Let alone without cuts. That's a testament to Greg [Wilson]'s talent as a director."

Monica S. Kuebler



Don't Look in The Basement: Ruth manipulates several children into entering the film.

exception of the Jeffrey Dahmers of the world and other extreme cases of serial killers, the average everyday monsters are those people, and that's who I wanted to show. When you watch these other films, they're great for the cinematic experience, but it's not based on reality. I'm never going to be afraid of Freddy or Jason or a guy with a hockey mask coming into my room. But if you're a child or if you're a parent or if you know kids, nieces, nephews, this element is very possible. Whether it's the babysitter, the priest or so on — any kind of sexual abuse, any kind of physical abuse, that's real and that's more than possible.

What do you think turns people into monsters?

In [Ruth's] particular case, and maybe in a lot of cases, I often think a victim will become a victimizer. I truly believe if you victimize a child, that child will grow up and will end up victimizing other children. [Ruth] viewed Meg as innocent, virginal, pure, untouched. That probably along with certain other trigger points, just set her off. ... This [character] is a woman that was probably powerless. Here she is, she has to raise her three sons without her husband. Her husband abandoned her, probably for another woman, led her to all this other behaviour with the drinking and much more relaxed morals, and this degeneration starts from there.

It would have been very easy to turn this into an exploitation film. What do you think separates *The Girl Next Door* from these sorts of movies?

If all you see are the elements that are exploitative, meaning the rape, the burning, the other elements, then you missed it. Then it's almost like a news piece, because when you hear the news, you hear that this victim was burned or raped, you didn't see or hear anything else. To me, what makes it not exploitative is that the focus of the story was not on


that event alone. I had three different approaches with this film, three different themes that I always went back to when I found myself straying. One was that this was a coming-of-age movie with children dealing with adult themes and adult elements, from sexuality and violence and curiosity and so on. You also have an unfilmed love story between Meg and David. I say love story in a platonic, almost puppy love kind of sense. And then you have the abuse, and the abuse doesn't happen in a vacuum. You see and understand why this happened. What we were trying to do was show that in a believable way, so you can say, "Okay, this makes sense, this is real, and it's not exploitative." We are going to show you what they did to her, but I am going to be careful about how I show it to you. And a lot of times, I implied more than I showed. That's something else that I tried to do. I wanted the fact that this happened to be the shock, but I didn't necessarily want to shock you with the actual images.

Would you consider *The Girl Next Door* a horror film?

To a degree, but think it's definitely a very deep, dark drama. I don't think it's a traditional horror film. I do think it is a social horror because it's still extreme. Most horror films, when you see the violence or the abuse or any of the elements, they are all about extremes. In that case, this film does have those elements, because it reflected those [that happened] in real life. If I was going to do a biopic of Jeffrey Dahmer, it would be a biopic but it would also be a horror film, because this was a horrific individual. That's how I look at it.

Do you see this in any way as a reaction or an antidote to horror's "torture porn" movement?

Yeah, and that's unfortunate because I think that's exploitative. That's catering to the very



**Blythe Auffarth bares
all to play brutalized
title character Meg.**

A Conversation With **THE GIRL NEXT DOOR**

BY MONICA S. KUEBLER

In Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door*, Blythe Auffarth's character is stripped, beaten, raped, branded with a red-hot needle, strung up in a filthy basement, starved and humiliated in many other ways. Playing Meg isn't exactly the role that Hollywood dreams are made of, but Auffarth is no stranger to tragic characters and emotionally taxing parts, having previously portrayed both Anne Frank and Helen Keller on stage. In fact, one of the key reasons she took on the role of Meg was for the challenge.

"I feel like she's a survivor, never a victim, and that's her most interesting trait," Auffarth tells *Rue Morgue*. "In spite of the atrocities she suffers, she's always fighting against it—with hope and determination and feror and tenacity. She is the survivor, she never just gives up, she's always fighting to the bitter end."

Auffarth threw herself into the role from the beginning, by not only reading Ketchum's novel but also pouring over the details of the real-life crime it was based on, which ultimately helped Meg become "more real" for the then still-teenage actress.

"I think upon reading the script, it was a little hard to grasp what was happening to the character because I was like, 'Oh my god, nothing like this could ever happen! There's no way somebody could be capable of such savagery,'" Auffarth recalls. "And when I saw that what had happened in the real case was exactly the same, if not worse, it was the green light to explore this, this was a real person."

So Auffarth sifted through actual case files, police photos, trial transcripts and newspaper clippings in preparation, and as a result formed something of an attachment to real-life victim Sylvia Marie Likens.

"It was difficult," she admits. "I tried to, at that point, stay a little bit emotionally detached so I

could really be objective and learn about the case, but once I started learning about [Sylvia], I couldn't help but become attached to her and empathize so much, to the point where I felt myself feeling a great deal of pain for her."

In turn, Auffarth channelled this pain and empathy into her creation of Meg, a likeable teen utterly undeserving of the abuses heaped upon her. It was a role that called for the actress to be extremely vulnerable as well as emotionally accessible and raw.

"The most [wearing] scene? All the scenes in which I am hung up and blindfolded," asserts Auffarth. "It's extremely humiliating and it's a little bit scary being so without control. It's scary being helpless and it's humiliating hanging and dangling there, and it's even more petrifying to have your senses taken away from you. I actually was blindfolded and I couldn't see, and so you're relying on your ability to hear and also trust those around you and the ways in which they deal with you. ... That wasn't anything that was acting—that was pure torture, so pun intended."

Despite how difficult some of these scenes were, and the terrifying places they required her to visit emotionally, Auffarth never lost sight that she was doing something very important. In fact, she feels *The Girl Next Door* is unparalleled as far as horror offerings go.

"I [don't] think there's a lot of genre-esque films out there that teach a lesson, or have a story, or are asking a question, or are made to make an impact, or are made to bring a situation or an actual happening to light," she says. "It's nice to see a film that can satiate people who like genre films or horrific dramas or hearty material and achieve some of those things I just mentioned. It's not just a shock value film. There was a reason why it was made, which was to bring the case of Sylvia Marie Likens to light." ☼

THE OTHER GIRL NEXT DOOR

AN AMERICAN CRIME

Starring Ellen Page, Catherine Keener and Hayley McFarland
Directed by Tommy O'Haver
Written by Tommy O'Haver and Irene Turner

If Jack Ketchum's *The Girl Next Door* didn't punish you enough, there's another nasty film based on the same harrowing true story planned for a summer release: Tommy O'Haver's *An American Crime*. Reining in many of the gory details of the case, and forgoing *The Girl Next Door*'s literary and filmic device of having the narrator as one of the perpetrators, *An American Crime* goes directly to the court records to present its version of the events.

Opening with the 1965 trial, the film smoothly shifts into the story of the Likens parents about to travel with a carnival for work, leaving their daughters Sylvia (Ellen Page: *Nerd Candy*) and Jamie Fay (Hayley McFarland, with Gertrude Bankowszki [Catherine Keener] and her seven children — complete strangers — for \$20 a week. When Gertrude's eldest daughter, Paula, meets with her married older lover, he gets violent with the girl, and to save her the brutality, Sylvia reveals Paula's pregnancy. Paula, furious that her secret is out, tells her mother that Sylvia's bees spreading lies about her. And Gertrude's punishments begin.

Enlisting the assistance of her children, Gertrude's frustrations of being unable to control her own kids are unleashed upon poor Sylvia, until she is literally thrown into the basement, becoming a punching bag and torture victim not just for the Bankowszki children, but for several neighborhood kids, as well.

The early part of the film is aglow with the warm tones of Americana. Sticked-back hair, fringed cars and pretty girls getting into trouble — images which later become blackened by the smoke from cigarettes on flesh. This more "realistic" version of the crime has even more of a "next door" feeling, as the filmmakers spend more time out of the basement and in the neighborhood and town than *7EYES*'s transgressors and victims. It also leans more on the psychological imbalance between the perpetrator and her victim, and their unfortunate torturous dynamic. In contrast to most true-crime tellings, Gertrude is not perceived as an isolated monster, but as a woman with problems. Severe problems.

Page breathes dimension into Sylvia and Keener's Gertrude is fascinating and fearful. Though Keener never elicits a monstrous façade, behind her eyes dwells a deeply disturbed woman. Here, we see denial at work — someone actually unable to take responsibility for their crime due to a psychological defense.

Due to its somewhat critical approach to such a dark subject, *An American Crime* will likely repel most viewers. Dark, dark, dark and brutally close to home, it's nevertheless essential viewing if only to not forget Sylvia Marie Likens, an innocent destroyed by an all-too-human monster, and to take a look at their mirror outcrops.

Shade Rupe



Scandalous Woman: Ruth (Keener)

large market of people who just want to get right to the point. "Torture porn," or porn period, means that you don't care about the romance part, you don't care about the love story — I'm going off on a tangent — you don't care about how the couple met, how they romance each other, you just want to get right into the sex and that's why porn's so ridiculous. But it's a huge market. Same thing with the torture, you don't necessarily want to care why they're torturing, you just want to get right to [it]. For me, that's 180 degrees from what I wanted to do. This is not a torture film, this is not an exploitative film, that's not the kind of film I wanted to make, that's not the kind of filmmaker I am.

How much input did Jack Ketchum have in the production?

He didn't really have much. He was very happy with what we were doing. In a way, his input was done once he wrote the book. He did his job, and then the writers translated it to a screenplay, then I came on board. He pretty much just took it all in. Every conversation I've had with him, he was extremely happy and very satisfied — because a lot of people told him that they just didn't think this film could ever be made because the nature of it, and we were able to do that.

It's one of the best book-to-film adaptations in recent years — congratulations on that.

Actually, I don't know if you've had a chance to speak to Jack at all, but recently Stephen King gave him a really great quote that he was very happy with. I can't remember the quote exactly, but he felt it was one of the best films that he's seen in twenty years. For him, it was the darker side of *Stand By Me*. And coming from Stephen King, an accomplished writer, that was a great quote.

Do you think you'll do something else in the horror genre?

Absolutely, I would love to. If the right project came along that I wanted to do, I would absolutely do it. I may want to go in the more traditional sense or not, it all depends on the material. To me it's not about the genre as much as it's about the script; if it's a good story and it's good material, that's what will interest me.

Other films that have been based on real-life crimes, such as *Karla*, have attracted quite a lot of backlash. Have you experienced anything like this with *The Girl Next Door*?

The only backlash that we get comes when people who don't know about the film see the it. If you have no knowledge of this film and you sit down to watch it, you're watching the beginning, a homeless person gets hit, you're watching a guy go through his own emotional trauma, then you're seeing these kids, you're being lulled into, "Okay, maybe this is a kids story, a *Stand By Me*-type story," and then when [it] degenerates into what happens, some people are shocked. I've been to screenings where we have had some people walk out because they were just utterly in shock. That would be the extent of the backlash, where we've actually had walkouts. I'll be very honest with you, I told the producers, I said, to a certain degree we knew this was going to happen, and I would rather offend you than bore you. ☹



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THE
BLACK BIBLE OF
BAVA

BY KIER-LA JANISSE



or horror fans who grew up reading magazines like *Gorezone* or *Video Watchdog*, Tim Lucas' Mario Bava biography was something of a fable, an epic project perpetually in the works, so ambitious in scope that it might never see the light of day. But now it's here, a twelve-pound monolith of text and images 30-plus years in the making: *All the Colors of the Dark*.

The 51-year-old writer's love affair with the Italian innovator's work was ironically spawned not from the screen, but from the printed page.

"I became interested [in Bava] quite a while before I actually saw the films, because I read about them in *Castle of Frankenstein* magazine," Lucas explains. "Joe Dante, who was then a critic for them — this is the mid-to-late 1960s — always wrote very laudably about [Bava's films], giving them 'special recommendation' stars and the like, so I was always on the lookout for them on television. For some reason, they never played at my local theatre like all the other AIP films did, *Black Sunday* and *Black Sabbath* were probably the first I saw."

Lucas also watched Fellini's "Toby Dammit" — the avant-garde filmmaker's contribution to the *Spirits of the Dead* anthology — and Bava's *Kill, Baby... Kill* within a two-week period. Both films shared an "evil little girl character" and Lucas wondered why the former director was internationally acclaimed, while the latter was obscure and often disrespected. He went looking for answers.

A burgeoning interest in the European strains of horror and the fantastic was not the norm in those days, however; their contrast of subtle surrealism and exaggerated visual flair was overshadowed by the more familiar pleasures of monster megathons Universal and Hammer.

"I didn't actually find anyone who shared my enthusiasm for Bava until I was probably 25," confesses Lucas, "and it wasn't until I was well into my 30s that I formed close friendships with fellow Bava fans. Quite a few of those friends were gay, drawn to European horror because of its style and incubation with the other arts — painting, sculpture, opera."

If one looks at the evolution and sheer girth of Lucas' own detail-oriented, analytical genre writing, it's not hard to see why he's recognized as the world's expert on the work of Bava. Lucas' take on obscure genre cinema first surfaced in a monthly column called *Video Watchdog* in the Chicago-based magazine *Video Movies*. A year later in 1985, when that magazine folded, Lucas' column was adapted into an audio-visual version included as part of *Overview*, a one-shot experimental video magazine produced by former *Monkey*-turned-entrepreneur Mike Nesmith (Nesmith's "radical" ideas have more often than not proven prophetic — i.e. he created MTV). But the experimental publishing world wasn't ready for the Nez yet either, so *Video Watchdog* took up an offer to appear regularly in *Fangoria*'s new side-project *Gorezone*. But by the close of the decade *Video Watchdog* would exist as its own entity, and *Gorezone* ceased publication in the early '90s (although there was a time when the magazine and the *Gorezone* column co-existed).

When Lucas started publishing *Video Watchdog* in its own right circa 1990, it was in response to the maltreatment genre films routinely suffered at the hands of distributors, critics and the MPAA classification board.

"Horror and fantasy films were being ravaged on home video — cut, rescored, cropped, even retitled — and I felt this was largely because they had no serious critical standing," offers Lucas. "The standard criticism for such films in those days was to laugh at them as trash, as with books like



“WHEN I STARTED, I HAD NO IDEA THAT HIS TWENTY-YEAR CAREER AS A DIRECTOR WAS PRECEDED BY ANOTHER TWENTY-YEAR CAREER AS A DIRECTOR OF PHOTOGRAPHY.”

Tim Lucas

The Golden Turkey Awards, or to gawk at them like something freakish, like *The Psychotronic Encyclopedia* (did). In Europe, these films have always been treated seriously because they are adult films there; here, they carry a whiff of the kiddie matinee, so writers were condescending toward them. Video Watchdog was determined to write about them knowledgeably, to probe the reasons why they were meaningful even to serious adult viewers, and help people get past their insecurities about liking them.”

The premiere issue of *Video Watchdog* appeared in 1990. According to Lucas, since then, a number of its avid readers have gone on to become producers, restorationists and company heads. “DVDs pretty much exemplify all that we said home video could be when we started out—correct aspect ratios, restored with deleted scene supplements, and so forth,” elaborates Lucas. “It’s very rare now to find even the least worthy movies treated without some kind of contextual respect.”

All the while, Lucas was plugging away at the Bava juggernaut that he had begun in spring of 1975.

“I didn’t intend a book at that time,” he says. “It was going to be a feature article for *Cinefantastique*. But the more I found out about Bava, the more the project grew. When I started, I had no idea that his twenty-year career as a director was preceded by another twenty-year career as a director of photography. That more than doubled the job right there.”

Writing the book also meant that Lucas had to become familiar with various elements of Italian

history in general: things like the silent cinema, opera, Mussolini, the Hollywood on the Tiber period and the careers of various bit players. In Lucas’ words, “the book is a minefield of tangents.”

As can be expected, many things derailed the project along the way, including Lucas’ busy schedule, his inability to speak Italian, the format evolution from index cards to a manual typewriter to a series of word processors (his wife Donna saved the project from several computer crashes) and general frustration at the scope of the undertaking.

“I gave it up a few times,” he admits. “Then I would be lured back by a new movie I was able to see, a new discovery, or even a dream. It often felt as though Bava was testing me from beyond the grave, or as though my persistence had to wear down his resistance to being biographed.”

For younger fans, it’s hard to imagine a time when Bava wasn’t revered as a camera jockey and visual innovator. But what most North Americans know about Bava comes directly from the research and articles of Tim Lucas. And early on, Bava’s predilection for trick photography was one of Lucas’ most exciting revelations.

“Just to find out that Bava created the special effects for his movies was a tremendous thing to discover,” affirms Lucas, “but to call him a ‘technical innovator’ is almost antithetical to Bava’s approach to such things. He always held that the best solution to any technical challenge was the simplest one. He managed to work through his entire career, up until his last film in 1980—in his effects work on Argento’s *Inferno*—using what



Master of the macabre (above) and *Black Sunday* (left) are listed; the director wears into *Black Sunday* on the left in *Black Sunday*.

THE BULK OF **MARIO BAVA'S '70S FILMS**
ARRIVE IN ANCHOR BAY'S SECOND DELUXE BOX SET
HIGHLIGHTING ITALY'S MAESTRO OF THE MACABRE.

BAVA

THE MARIO BAVA COLLECTION VOLUME 2
LISA & THE DEVIL
HOUSE OF EXORCISM
BAY OF BLOOD
KIDNAPPED
BOY COLT AND
WINCHESTER JACK
5 DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON
FOUR TIMES
THAT NIGHT
8 FILMS BY MARIO BAVA

BOX OF BLOOD



While Mario Bava was never limited exclusively to the horror and giallo genres, it's here that he excelled. Anchor Bay continues its tribute to the "Maestro of the Macabre" by releasing volume two of The Mario Bava Collection. This set offers eight films covering Bava's '70s output almost in its entirety: *Four Times That Night* (his first and only sex comedy), *Five Dolls for an August Moon*, *Boy Colt and Winchester Jack* (one of numerous spaghetti westerns by the director), *Bay of Blood*, *Lisa*

and *the Devil*, *House of Exorcism* (a producer's reworking of *Lisa* and *the Devil*) and the recently released *Kidnapped* (Bava's first crime drama).

All of these films and many of their extras were originally available on DVD from Image, but Anchor Bay has retransferred them (all anamorphically) and cleaned them up as much as possible. Also new to these releases are three stellar commentaries by Bava biographer Tim Lucas (*Mario Bava: All the Colors of the Dark*). *Rue Morgue* looks at the five films in the second Bava box set that fit the horror mould.

FIVE DOLLS FOR AN AUGUST MOON (1970)

Bava, always a working director, likely took this one for the paycheck. Sure, *Five Dolls* lacks a coherent plot, interesting characters and dialogue, and for that matter any real scul, but it does have a meat locker full of dead bodies, a cast of beautiful, strong women and a signature Bava look.

The Agatha Christie-style murder mystery sees several couples on an island retreat, among them Professor Farrel (William Berger), inventor of a much sought-after resin, and his wife. The other couples turn out to be busi-

ness associates of the island's owner, industrialist George Stark (Freddie Curra), who attempt to pressure Farrel into selling his formula. When he refuses, people start dying.

The plot is muddled and we're never sure just how long it's taking for the action to unfold (a day, a week?), but the film is rich in style. Bava uses his zoom lens to great effect here, breaking down scenes into a single shot and skillfully guiding the audience's gaze. While the extremely small budget may have prompted this stylistic choice, it gives the film a gritty immediacy. Ultimately, though, *Five Dolls* is more of a dress rehearsal for its vastly superior sister film *Bay of Blood*.

BAY OF BLOOD (1970)

Like many Italian horror and giallo movies of the '70s, *Twist of the Death Nerve* has been known by many names, including *Carnage*, *Blood Bath*, *Last House on the Left*, *Part II* and *Chain Reaction*, but Anchor Bay opted to use the title on the print of this film, *Bay of Blood*.

It starts with the violent murder of a wheelchair-bound countess by her husband, who is then in turn murdered himself moments later. As friends and relations of the woman vie for inheritance money, a bunch of teenagers complicate matters by camping out at her

estate, and the body count rises. Characters are introduced and then cut down as Bava sets up red herring after red herring — and like a Shakespearean tragedy, no one is spared.

It's one of Bava's bloodiest films and features makeup effects by the creator of E.T., Carl Lumbly, plus masterfully tense music by Silvio Ojeda. Possibly the last masterpiece of Bava's career, *Bay of Blood* essentially created the slasher genre (the *Friday the 13th* series features numerous parallels to it). The disc also includes the trailer for *Carnage*, two radio spots for *Twist of the Death Nerve* and commentary by Tim Lucas.

BARON BLOOD (1972)

Baron Blood marks Bava's last return to the style of Hammer remakes that inspired *The Mask of Satan* (a.k.a. *Black Sunday*). It's a return to iron maidens, supernatural occurrences and witchcraft, only this time instead of black and white, it's in Technicolor with a very '70s vibe and roaming zoom lens.

American student Peter Kleist (Antonio Carlucci) visits the Austrian castle once owned by his great-grandfather, Baron Otto Von Kleist, only to discover it's being converted into a hotel by entrepreneur Herr Dortmund (Dieter Tressler). With the help of an ancient document and Dortmund's sexy assistant (Elke Sommer), Peter resurrects the sadistic Baron. Dortmund is killed and plans for the tourist trap are thwarted. Enter wheelchair-bound Alfred Becker (Joseph Cotton), who buys the castle and has a sinister connection to the Baron.

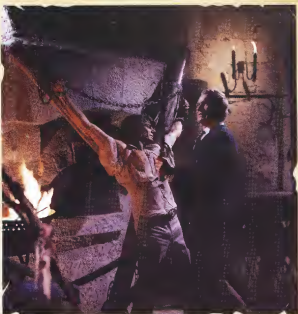
Cotton's dual role of Becker and the Baron (no spoiler here, the film does a poor job of hiding this fact), was influenced by Vincent Price in *House of Wax*. Bava even wanted Price in the role, but after their disastrous collaboration on *Dr. Goldfoot and the Girl Bombs*, the actor wouldn't work with him again. Tim Lucas details more about it in his commentary.

LISA AND THE DEVIL (1972)

This surreal masterpiece is also Bava's most personal film. His father, Eugenio, liked to carve wax statues of the saints, which captured Mario's attention at a young age (hence the younger Bava's fascination with *House of Wax*) and it shows here.

Elke Sommer plays Lisa, a tourist in Spain who gets lost and happens upon a villa populated by a blind countess and her neurotic son Maximilian (Alessio Orano). They have a servant, Leandro (Telly Savalas), who constantly tends to a wax mannequin of the countess' late husband, Carlos. Lisa is a dead ringer for Elina, both Carlos and Maximilian's lover.

The twisted tale of murder and sexual deviation has all the Bava hallmarks and it's clear that he was striving for something grander than just another genre film. But *Lisa and the Devil* was



Baron Blood: Bava's return to Gothic witchcraft and torture, and (below) Robert Alda as Father Michael in *The House of Exorcism*, producer Alfredo Leone's reworking of *Lisa and the Devil*

never released in his lifetime. In what was a crushing blow, it would not be seen (outside of a 1973 screening at Cannes) until after his death, when it was licensed for late-night television in 1983.

Never looking better on disc, this release also boasts theatrical trailers, radio spots, insightful commentary by Lucas and the re-edited version of the film, *The House of Exorcism*.

THE HOUSE OF EXORCISM (1972)

Lisa and the Devil marked the beginning of the end of Bava's career. In his mind it was the movie that would allow him to rise above the genre film, one that would allow him to be an artist in league with fellow Italian directors Fellini and Rossellini. When Lisa failed to generate much interest, producer Alfredo Leone reworked it.

Leone chopped the film into pieces and threw them together again with pepper ground from *The Exorcist*, and voilà: *House of Exorcism*. Leone renders Bava's dream world into a flashback for an exorcism story; in the opening, Lisa succumbs to a fit and is sent to a hospital, where a priest inter-

venes. Now the story becomes both Lisa's struggle with Leandro and Father Michael's (Robert Alda) struggle with the devil and ultimately his faith.

This is more of a Mickey Lion movie (Leone's pseudonym) than a Bava film. Nevertheless, its inclusion, even as an extra, is important since this is the film that audiences saw. During this period, Bava tried to reinvent himself with 1973's rape-revenge-styled *Bad Dogs* (RM#67) — also included in the box set — but after one of its investors died, it also sat in a vault until after the filmmaker's death. ☠





"IT OFTEN FELT AS THOUGH
BAVA WAS TESTING ME
FROM BEYOND THE GRAVE."

Vin Lucas

were essentially silent film techniques. The phantom in his movie *Shock* is light projected through a cardboard cut-out. The lava in *Heracles in the Haunted World* and *Planet of the Vampires* was pots with red light shining on it, with little nitrogen pellets dropped in to create smoky pops."

Bava's trademark colour schemes and chiaroscuro lighting led Lucas to adopt the title *All the Colors of the Dark* for the book, and the filmmaker's lush imagery pervades the 1128-page tome, which boasts a pictorial history to match Lucas' Herculean efforts in the research department. Rare full-colour posters, stills, lobby cards and photobusts (Italian lobby cards) line the book from cover to cover — the bulk of which came from the Bava family, the archive of the late Eisenstein translator/expert Alan Upchurch and Lucas' own priceless collection.

Video Watchdog readers are well aware of Donna's behind-the-scenes contribution to the magazine, and she would go on to play a pivotal role in bringing the Bava book to fruition, as well. She edited the book, and had her hands full cleaning up the artwork for print.

"Thankfully, three friends helped me with the digital restoration," she acknowledges. "Charlie Largent, our Video Watchdog cover artist; Simenida Uih, a fine Serbian artist and graphic designer based in Washington, DC; and Matthew Bradshaw, Photoshop specialist and subscriber to the magazine. As far as a process for restoring one poster for instance, some of the challenges included removing the folds, repainting over the holes and tears and folds, straightening out — sometimes even re-creating — the text, removing yellowed areas, removing glare from the flash and

twinkling the colour that was knocked out of whack by the lighting in the room. One poster could take hours to do."

The care put into every detail of the book sets it apart from other writing about the Italian master's work. Lucas is openly critical of previous texts devoted to Bava, but with 32 years of research under his belt, one can hardly blame him.

"I wasn't very happy about the Troy Howard book coming out," says Lucas of the 2002 FAB publication *The Haunted World of Mario Bava*. "But in retrospect, it probably needed to happen, to push me into getting off my egg, so to speak. Troy's analyses of the films are his own and you can make of them what you will, but his research was lazy and resulted in a fair amount of misinformation, beginning with incorrect birth and death dates for Bava."

"With the exception of an occasional essay,"

Lucas continues, "like Alain Silver and James Ursini's *Mario Bava: The Illusion of Reality* — which appeared in their book *The Vampire Film* — and

books like [Carlos] Clarens' *An Illustrated History of the Horror Film* and Danny Peary's *Cult Movies*, with its chapter on *Black Sunday*, it's hard to find anything of substance written about Bava's films in English that wasn't either written by me or based to some extent on my primary research. My first Bava article appeared in two consecutive issues of *Fanoria* back in 1985. A key difference between the Clarens and Peary books and [my book] is that they asserted that Bava's career went downhill after his black and white debut film; my book reveals that *Black Sunday* actually wasn't his first directorial effort, and it's also my argument that Bava only discovered his particular genius after abandoning black and white."

Sadly, despite the reappraisal Bava's work has enjoyed in genre circles since his death, in the eyes of the Italian public he still hasn't joined the ranks of national film heroes Fellini, Rossellini, Bertolucci, Pasolini or Antonioni.

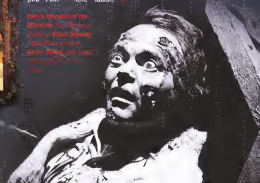
"Bava's reputation in Italy is generally the same as it ever was," says Lucas with frustration. "They don't know who he is. His horror films were ignored there, and his only successful Italian releases were his epic films and comedies. William Friedkin recently went to Rome for a festival and told the local press that his favorite Italian directors were Mario Bava and Dario Argento, when the story hit the papers, Bava's name was seriously misapprehended."

One can imagine that completing a project like this after so long must be simultaneously invigorating, exhausting and depressing. When asked if he is still as passionate about Bava's films, Lucas has to think about it.

"It's a hard question to answer," he muses. "Still as passionate? Yes. But even though I'm sure the work still has things it could teach me, I've lived in very close quarters with it for a very long time. I literally didn't know until recently what it was like to be an adult and not working on this project. I never vowed to live with this book till death do we part, only until I finished it. So, while I'm not exhausted by it and I realize that there still remain discoveries to be made about his work, I feel I've had my more than generous say and pass that responsibility on to other researchers — maybe the next ones will speak Italian." ☺



Bava's *Monks of the Desert* (top) inspired Clavin in *Black Sunday*. Right: *Black Sunday* in Bava's *Black Sunday* (top) and *Black Sunday* (bottom).



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THE HORROR POSTER ART OF **TOM CHANTRELL**

BY JAMES BURRELL

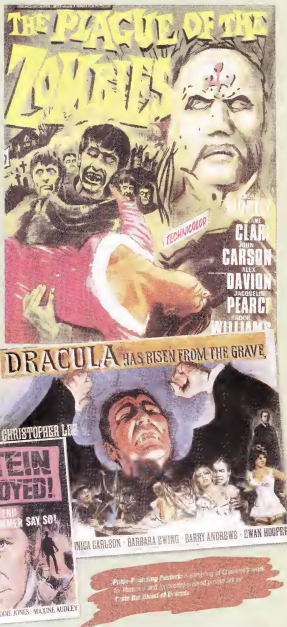
Long before the advent of computer graphic arts technology, cinema poster art was created by talented and skilled artists who, with brush, paint and a fertile imagination, were able to evoke feelings of spectacle and horror in their work. A well-designed movie poster featuring provocative artwork was enough to put crowds into cinema seats. Few understood this better than British artist Tom Chantrell.

Born in Manchester, England in 1916, Chantrell studied at Manchester Art College during his teens but quit early to work at a local advertising agency. At age seventeen, he relocated to London and took a job with the Alardyce Palmer advertising agency, where he eventually specialized in movie poster design. During wartime he served in the Royal Engineers bomb-disposal unit, but later returned to Alardyce Palmer, where he continued to work until the 1970s.

From his first poster for the 1938 gangster-comedy *The Amazing Dr. Clitterhouse*, to the 1968 Steve McQueen action flick *Bullitt*, to *Star Wars* in 1977, Chantrell designed posters for hundreds of films of all genres. But he is best known and admired today for the advertising art he created for England's Hammer Films—which features strikingly grand, colourful and sometimes outrageous imagery that's especially effective on 30 x 40-inch horizontal British "quad" posters.

Chantrell, who worked right next door to Hammer's business offices on Wardour Street, acquired steady employment with the studio, sometimes working on five posters at one time. Because of his ability to render horrific and sexy paintings in broad, loose brush strokes that mimicked a Gothic nightmare perfectly befitting the studio's output, he was often commissioned by Hammer head Sir James Carreras to compose poster designs for upcoming films before the scripts were even written. Carreras was a skilled old-time salesman who depended on Chantrell's provocative, attention-grabbing images to sell film concepts to distributors, thereby raising financing for the company's productions.

Once a film was in production, the artist would design its release poster, relying only on a synopsis of the film and a few stills for references. If suitable photos weren't available, he would simply use family members as models. One of the most popular Hammer posters, for 1968's *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave*, features not Sir Christopher Lee, but Chantrell himself as the title character, fets clenched high in the air.



HANDS OF THE RIPPER



THIS IS A HAMMER FILM

The late Ron Chantrell poses with rare concept art for *The Scars of Dracula* and *Quatermass and the Pit*.



During his tenure with Hammer, Chantrell worked at a furious pace, crafting hundreds of designs, for such films as *Dracula*, *Prince of Darkness* (1966), *Phique of the Zombies* (1966), *Rasputin*, *The Mad Monk* (1966), *The Reptile* (1966), *The Witches* (1966), *Frankenstein Created Woman* (1966), *The Mummy's Shroud* (1966), *Quatermass and the Pit* (1967), *The Devil Rides Out* (1968), *Dracula Has Risen from the Grave* (1968), *Frankenstein Must Be Destroyed* (1968), *Taste the Blood of Dracula* (1969) and *The Satanic Rites of Dracula* (1974).

Hammer kept Chantrell so busy that in some instances, to save time, he reworked elements of his previous artwork into new pieces. The poster for Hammer's popular 1965 dinosaur epic, *One Million Years B.C.*, for example, reused his image of Raquel Welch when Hammer reissued it with *She* (1966). The artist simply cut Welch out and placed her onto the new artwork, but also painted a completely new piece for *She* star Ursula Andress.

Chantrell also lent his talents to other outlets. His book jacket artwork for Dennis Gifford's 1973 *A Pictorial History of Horror Movies* helped to make it a prized possession for many monster kids of the '70s. Then, in the 1980s, when movie poster artwork began to wane, he found himself designing covers for the burgeoning home video market. A few years later, this source of employment dried up too, as studios were relying more and more on computer-generated designs for their videotape covers.

Chantrell passed away on July 15, 2001 at the age of 85, but his legacy as Hammer's signature painter endures. His posters are rare collectors items now, valued at several hundred dollars a piece, in part because England has always had a smaller market than the United States, so the number of posters printed was much lower, but mostly because of the buxom babes and sinister villains he brought to life (and death) in his wonderfully deft and artistic work.

To view more of Chantrell's work, visit hammerhorror-posters.com.



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MYSTERY SCIENCE THEATER 3000's MAIN MAN IS BACK, AND THIS TIME, NO GENRE MOVIE IS SAFE!



MIKE NELSON

HECKLER AT LARGE

by Paul Corupe

ILLUSTRATION BY JUSTIN CRICKSON

It was the moment fans had been waiting for: After eleven seasons adrift in space, spent heckling some of the most unbearable genre films ever made, *Mystery Science Theater 3000* star Mike Nelson—along with his add-tongued robot puppet pals, Tom Servo (Bill Corbett) and Crow T. Robot (Kevin Murphy)—managed to escape home to Earth to lead normal lives in the series' final episode. Although no longer forced to endure films such as *Hogobobs*, *The Screaming Skull* and *Monster A-Go-Go*, the show ended as the three main characters nevertheless found themselves in front of the TV in a tiny apartment, making yet more verbal jabs at trashy movies, echoing the sardonic pleasure we all feel when watching a particularly inept horror flick.

Playful irony aside, the long-running show's final segment has become something of a self-fulfilling prophecy for head writer Nelson, who in 1993 took over acting duties on series co-creator Joel Hodgson's clever twist on the classic TV horror host formula. Episodes of *Mystery Science Theater 3000* would show a film with the silhouetted backs of the commentators (bobs included) in theatre seats along the bottom of the screen, coping with each cinematic atrocity fed to them with a hilarious running commentary that would poke fun at everything from laughable effects to the lead actor's haircut. Despite being canceled in 1998, a steady stream of DVD box sets from Rhino Video has seen *MST3K*'s cult following continue to grow. It's little surprise then to see Nelson re-teaming with some of his cohorts for two new *MST3K*-styled projects, *The Film Crew* and *Rifftrax*, which have taken the relationship between commentary and film one step further—the time, sans puppets.

"It was fun, but they were actually a lot of trouble to work with," chuckles Nelson, when asked about performing with Servo and Crow. "They were sort of reverse-engineered; they would break constantly and catch fire and start melting. That part of it made shoots difficult."

Servo and Crow's operators, Murphy and Corbett—playing themselves this time—reunited with Nelson as The Film Crew in 2004 to produce a pilot for a radio-based movie review show that was aired on NPR. While that venture never fully panned out, the three collaborators found it easy to recast the idea into a straight-to-DVD B-movie roast that would echo many of the best elements of *MST3K*.

"We just have so much fun working together that we just keep looking for ways to keep doing it," says Nelson. "Since the *Mystery Science* DVDs do so well, I thought we could try to continue the tradition straight-to-video." (After this interview was conducted, Hodgson announced his own competing project, a show called *Cinematic Taboo*, which involves original *MST3K* alumni Trace Beaulieu and J. Elvis Weinstein, and is slated to premiere in time for Christmas.)

Released by Shout! Factory, a company owned by some of the folks who started Rhino, the premise of *The Film Crew* involves an off-screen eccentric millionaire, Bob Honcho, who believes every movie ever made deserves a commentary track and has hired the guys for just that purpose. Invariably, however, the films they are assigned to watch are appallingly bad.

"Kevin, Bill and I all chose the films we off on for Film Crew, but it's somewhat limited by rights," explains



When a comedy fails, it's not funny by definition, but when a horror movie fails, then it has a much higher chance of being funny.

Mike Nelson

Movie-theatergoers remember selected scenes from *Killzone* (from *Space*, from left to right: Kevin Murphy, DS Galtner) and *Foley* (from *Science*) (The *Film Crew* and *Rolling* show)

Nelson. "We really want to have those sorted out, because we've been bitten before on *Mystery Science* — you think something's free and clear, but it can get pulled back for a number of reasons."

For the first batch of DVDs they've tackled four public domain stinkers: *Hollywood After Dark*, *The Wild Women of Wingo*, *The Giant of Maratona* and, their most entertaining effort, *Killzone* from *Space*. While the setting has changed from a spaceship to a dingy basement, and the familiar silhouettes are gone, watching *The Crew* is like catching up with old friends, as they recreate the manic heckling of *MST3K*'s heyday, mercilessly skewering each film for its awful production values, embarrassing acting performances and clueless directing.

In addition, since 2006 Nelson has steadily released movie commentaries through Rifftrax, a website that allows you to purchase and download a full-length MP3, which can be listened to as an accompaniment to an existing DVD. Though both *The Film Crew* and *Mystery Science Theatre 3000* focus exclusively on bad cinema, this new project has allowed Nelson, and occasional co-hosts including many *MST3K* alumni, Neil Patrick Harris and Fred Willard to provide humorous observations on virtually any film. Titles thus far have included schlock outings such as *The Wicker Man* remake and *Plan 9 from Outer Space*, plus blockbusters, such as *Raiders of the Lost Ark*, *The Lord of the Rings* and *300*.

Each Rifftrax commentary can be purchased for \$3 or \$4 as a downloadable sound file from Rifftrax.com, and is often synced with the existing DVD by the viewer, with the help of "Disembaudio," a synthesized voice on the track that occasionally reads a line of dialogue. By having the end user match the sound and image, it's an ingenious way to avoid legal and rights issues.

Nelson explains that there are other considerations, too. "I say you can pick any film, but

there is one major criteria: it has to be pretty available. Something like *Red Dawn* would be a lot of fun, but people really like the bigger titles that may be on their shelf already, or ones they can go rent without much difficulty."

As with *Mystery Science Theatre*, horror films make up a notable part of Rifftrax catalogue, as mocking tracks for schlockers like John Frankenheimer's *The Island of Dr. Moreau* and *Troll 2* ("it was a good idea for them to use music left over from *Alien*," quips Nelson) are added next to slightly more respectful — but not always — approaches to *Night of the Living Dead*, and even John Carpenter's *Halloween*. This latter selection sees Nelson and guest Kevin Murphy concentrating more on the onscreen action with comments such as, "in fairness to the bullies that tripped him, it is pretty dorky to bring a pumpkin to school."

"As a kid, I was a typical fan of horror movies and creature features, but I probably wasn't as reverential as some people about them," reveals Nelson. "I've found that the riffing process — being sort of a meta-commentary, as well as straight-ahead humor — lends itself well to almost every genre, except comedy. When a comedy fails, it's not funny by definition, but when a horror movie fails, then it has a much higher chance of being funny."

Though badly made horror films lend themselves to easy ridicule, as *MST3K* proved by transforming several horror film footnotes, including *Manos: The Hand of Fate* and *The Creeping Terror*, into full-fledged cult classics, Nelson says that as the quality of the film goes up, the slyness shifts his focus to other aspects of the production. He even admits that

he has personally enjoyed several of the Rifftrax films.

"For what the resources were, *Carnival of Souls* was a film that I liked," he notes. "It was kind of nice to see those resources used effectively, because we did so many at *Mystery Science* that didn't. Although, when you get so close to a film, watching it over and over as you're writing, by necessity you become pretty critical. Even in a respectable movie, the flaws are almost totally magnified, and it's hard to love them even if they're pretty good."

Still, even when he's not endlessly rewatching a purist creature feature for his latest project, Nelson acknowledges that it can be a challenge to keep his mocking comedic reflexes in check.

"Back when my wife and I would watch TV together, we found we were commenting on pretty much everything without even realizing it. We decided that probably wasn't a good thing, that we were becoming bitter, so we got rid of it. But in the theatre I'm a good boy, I don't make any comments at all. Outside of *The Film Crew* and Rifftrax, I'm really not that obnoxious!"



Film, Video, Dvd & Reissues

CINEMACABRE



30 Days of Night: Larry Huston as lead vampire Marlow

BLOODSOAKED IN BARROW

30 DAYS OF NIGHT

Starring Josh Hartnett, Melissa George and Danny Huston
Directed by David Slade
Written by Steve Niles, Stuart Beattie and Brian Nelson
Columbia

Rue Morgue declared this film its most anticipated of 2007, and I too floated into the darkened theatre high on expectations for the adaptation of Steve Niles and Ben Temple-Smith's groundbreaking vampire comic. If this wasn't a perfect horror film, there would be no mercy, I would rip it a new jugular.

Now, I can't do it. *30 Days of Night* may not be perfect, but it has such perfect parts. For a mainstream blockbuster, it is bold and bloody in its use of violence and gore, and remains true to the original comic in style and substance. Its main flaw is that it is perhaps too much so. Instead of feeling throat-tightening tension and heart-stopping shock, I'd actually wished I hadn't read the comic so I could be taken on the ride for the first time.

As in the comic, Barrow, Alaska is preparing for 30 days of winter darkness when a gang of vampires descends upon the remote town. Pretty-boy sheriff Eben Oleson (Josh

Hartnett) and his ex Stella (Melissa George) try to get along long enough to stave off the attack for a month. It's fairly predictable siege horror from thereon, as the residents are picked off in progressively gruesome ways, but that's not why you've come: you're here for the vampires. And they, dear children of the night, are perfect.

More than anything, *30 Days of Night* promised badass bloodsuckers, and it delivered. These nosferatu are as far from Lost as Barrow is from the equator, signature shark-like teeth snapping and tearing at flesh without hesitation, ashen faces smeared with blood, eyes deadened to sympathy. They bear some resemblances to vampires past — they've got a Renfield-like minion (Ben Foster's unsettlingly rabid *The Stranger*), and are easily scorched — but are infinitely more savage. No scientific or supernatural explanation for their origins and motivations is given or needed; they are hungry and will fuck you up. Just the sound of them, the high-pitched screeching like some kind of alien seagull, is enough to immortalize these monsters.

Any romance factor in *30 Days of Night* comes from the gorgeous art direction and set design. In one stunning shot, the camera swoops over the main artery of the town capturing the vampires' rampage — humans become more lumps of red on white snow, like slaughtered seals. Maybe it's not an

expertly crafted cinematic symphony, but it's brutal and beautiful enough to keep me scratching at the coffin for a sequel.

Lisa Ladouceur

DRIVE-IN-STYLE DISCIPLINE

DRIFTWOOD

Starring Rocky Ufman, Dallas Page and Talan Toriano
Directed by Tim Sullivan
Written by Chris Kobin and Tim Sullivan
Dark Horse Indie

With *Driftwood*, director Tim Sullivan drops the amped-up EC Comics antics of his first two features (2001 *Mauls* and *Flood of Horror*) to deliver a campy but surprisingly effective boys-behind-bars saga that harkens back to the bummy teen horror flicks of the 1950s and early '60s. Newcomer Rocky Ufman plays David, a misunderstood goth teen (has anyone ever met a clearly understood goth teen?) who is sent to Driftwood, "an attitude adjustment camp" for young men, by his controlling parents after they read his death-obsessed journal. It seems that David can't get over the recent death of his live-fast, die-young older brother.

The scenery chewing begins in earnest with the introduction of Driftwood's founder and warden, Captain Kennedy, a redneck hillbilly sadist straight off of a beer-stained drive-in screen. Played with bug-eyed relish by WCW and WWE veteran Diamond Dallas Page (*The Devil's Rejects*, *Hood of Horror*), Captain Kennedy and his band of discipline-obsessed sidekicks work the boys to the bone while doling out frontier-justice punishments to any of the lads who fail to get with the program. David's nights in the dorm are soon haunted by what may be the ghost of a former inmate, whose mysterious death has doomed him to wander the compound for eternity looking like the back-up DJ for Insane Clown Posse.

Unravelling the mystery of that ghostly entity's origins revs the narrative engine for this battle-of-the-generations morality tale, in which every adult is a caricature of unfeeling



authority, while the tough-talking juvenile delinquents are revealed as sensitive teens who made a few bad choices. Amazingly enough, the over-the-top performances, cool institutional setting and brisk pacing will probably have you cheering for the little guys by the halfway point, and maybe even pinning for the glory days of the drive-in.

James Grainger

A SURPRISING SEQUEL

SPECIES: THE AWAKENING

Starring Ben Cross, Helena Mattsson
and Marlene Favela
Directed by Nick Lyon
Written by Ben Ripley
MG/M/FOX

Sex and slane are the hallmarks of the *Species* franchise so it's surprising to find the fourth film, *Species: The Awakening*, more reliant on plot and character than alien T&A.

Helena Mattsson stars as Miranda, an implausibly young American college professor whose only family is her Uncle Tom (Ben Cross). On the eve of her acceptance to Oxford, a jogger finds her naked on a path and she's rushed to hospital. Here Miranda's true nature—as a horny descendent of the original film's alien DNA—is discovered when she morphs into the H.R. Giger-designed creature we're familiar with and slaughters the stuff. Tom—actually the geneticist who helped create Miranda—rescues her and shuttles her down to Mexico. There he hopes to find Forbes (Dominic Keating), the former student with whom he made Miranda, and discover a way to save her from the alien part of her genetic makeup. They track down Forbes, who has created other alien-human hybrids including Azura (Marlene Favela), a gorgeous but deadly brunette who senses Miranda's true nature. With Miranda close to death and the only way to save her being to take a life, Ben is forced to decide how far he'll go to save the experiment he has come to love.

A resonant moral dilemma in a *Species* film? The diminishing returns of its predecessors had expectations for *The Awakening* in the basement, especially considering that it was written by Ben Ripley, who penned the atrocious *Species III*. But here he ably balances genre expectations (gore, nudity, alien carnage) with the demands of the story. Kudos too to director Nick Lyon who uses a modest budget to great effect. He and his crew pull off some amazing stunt sequences and creature effects (check out Favela as a meringue alien nun), giving us just enough to get our monster fix but not so much that the production's relative cheapness becomes apparent.



Helena Mattsson takes over alien duties from Natasha Henstridge

Fans of boobs, blood, bile and Natasha Henstridge (absent from the series this time) may be disappointed, but this *Species* is a superior breed of entertainment.

Sean Plummer

HURST THE WORST

PUMPKINHEAD 4: BLOOD FEUD

Starring Lance Henriksen,
Amy Manson and Bradley Taylor
Written and directed by Michael Hurst
Sony

The franchise hatchet job that began with the Sci-Fi Channel's horrendous production of last year's *Pumpkinhead: Ashes to Ashes* (RM #66) continues with *Blood Feud*, the fourth and worst *Pumpkinhead* movie yet.

The film unfortunately tries to update the infamous Hatfield-McCoy hillbilly feud of the American South—specifically the Ozark mountain range. When a girl from the McCoy clan is accidentally killed by some of the Hatfield boys, young Ricky McCoy goes to the “witch of the woods” to seek revenge in the form of *Pumpkinhead*.

Made on the cheap in Romania and stocked with Romanian extras pretending that they're Southern folk, the film is shot on what appears to be an Old West ghost town set, which proves to be questionably anachronistic, making one wonder if it was originally supposed to be a period piece that was suddenly scrapped.

The most unfortunate part of the whole movie, however, is that the titular monster has been completely wussified since the original Stan Winston creation stalked the screen back in 1988. With more face time than some of the main characters, the new P-head is a guy in a rubber suit who saunters around with a roar that's about as scary as a yawning Chihuahua. The creature does rip off a few heads and disembowels

a few unlucky kinfolk, but in the end it's more goofy than scary.

Lance Henriksen reprises his role as the wrinkled ghost of Ed Harley, and even though his screen time totals about three minutes, he absolutely steals the show, delivering his lines with a gruff wisdom that only he can.

If you still hold a soft spot for the original *Pumpkinhead*, skip this one so you can remember what it was like it before writer/director Michael Hurst gutted it.

Last Chance Lance

DRESSED TO KILL

MURDER PARTY

Starring Chris Sharp, Alex Barnett
and Macon Blair
Written and directed by
Jeremy Saulnier
Magnat

With its slick editing, competent acting, sharp dialogue and ambitious gore effects, low-budget horror-comedy *Murder Party* obviously has considerable talent behind it. But none of that really makes any difference because it's boring as hell.

The story involves a middle-aged Napoleon Dynamite-ish loser named Chris, who finds an invite to a private Halloween party in the street. Upon arrival, he realizes it's a trap, as a group of dragged-up artists have lured him there to be the subject of a deranged plot: murder him in the most artistic manner possible to win a grant from their wealthy, charismatic leader Alexander. As the night goes on, the students snort coke, drink, take a truth-serum drug and bicker a lot. Eventually they turn on each other, resulting in a manic bloodbath, hence the film's tagline “everybody dies.”

The premise here is shaky at best (how did they know anyone would show up?) but it's difficult to make an 80-minute film out of one murder, especially when there are seven





VLAD IRONSIDE

THE V WORD

Starring Arjay Smith, Brandon Naden and Michael Ironside
Directed by Ernest R. Dickerson
Written by Mick Garris
Anchor Bay

How can anyone not like a movie with Michael Ironside in it? I mean, he's right up there with John Saxon (no, I'll never stop dropping his name - Saxon rules!) in terms of older, badass, cult-cool motherfuckers. From his performance as the trigger-happy, leather coat-clad Richter in *Total Recall*, to the intergalactic bug-hunting Lieutenant Jean Rasczak in *Starship Troopers*, to Colt Hawker, the lunatic misogynist rapist killer in *Waiting Hours*, and, of course, the mind-combusting Darryl Revok in *Scanners*, Ironside rarely, if ever, disappoints.

Too bad the same can't be said for the *Masters of Horror* episode "The V Word." Here, Ironside plays Mr. Chaney (in a plainly obvious nod to you-know-who), a paedophilic high school math teacher turned fangless-weirdo-bloodsucking-vampire-in-a-bad-suit, who's evidently been employing a peculiar method of draining blood from corpses prior to their embalming at the Collinswood Funeral Home. A ridiculous and fun premise, however...

Enter zombie video game junkies Kerry (Arjay Smith) and Justin (Brandon Naden), two angst-ridden teenage pals who break into Chaney's mortuary in the hopes of seeing "a real dead person" and catching some cheap thrills. They blow half the episode skulking around the place burping bad dialogue and spooking themselves (but not viewers) before Count Ironside finally catches up with Kerry and rips his throat open with his bare hands. Justin escapes, Kerry "turns" him, Chaney shows up with a goody umbrella(!) and it all ends in predictable, sloppy ledum.

Though director Ernest R. Dickerson (*Tales from the Crypt: Demon Knight*) does make effective use of a few elongated shadows and K&NB turns in some nice bloodwork, ultimately "The V Word" is a pretty listless, unimpressive entry in the *Masters of Horror* series. Still, if you're an iron-hard Ironside fan like me, you'd let this one put the bite on you anyway.

Jovanka Vuckovic



Murder Party: Co-producer Chris Sharp stars as unlucky Halloween party guest Chris

killers and the victim is bound and gagged. To fill the gaps, there are long passages of dialogue, most of which do little to advance the plot. Though the emphasis is on comedy over horror, the writing is never laugh-out-loud funny, only mildly entertaining.

Where *Murder Party* succeeds is with its bloodsoaked climax, where there's a crazed burn victim, several axe murders and loads of chainsaw mayhem. It just takes too long to get there, and when it does, you won't care what happens to the film's protagonist, since he's virtually ignored during the guts of the story.

Writer/director Jeremy Saulnier has proven he has the technical chops to make it in the horror biz, but next time he should pass along script duties to someone else. Making a good movie out of a bad idea is a fool's game.

Aaron Von Lupton

SLEAZY SUCKERS

NIGHT JUNKIES

Starring Giles Alderson, Kasia Winter and René Zagger
Written and directed by Lawrence Pearce
Aluminator

What if Jack the Ripper was a vampire? It would make a great movie, wouldn't it? Sadly, this one isn't it. Although *Night Junkies* is a vampire film about predators and prostitutes in East End London, it's a purely modern, urban drama. First-time director Lawrence Pearce presents an interesting premise: vampires are not supernatural creatures at all. They don't fear garlic. They don't sizzle at the touch of a crucifix. They don't wear capes or know kung-fu. Rather, these creatures of the night are merely blood addicts, stalking the city's underbelly like anyone desperately in search of a fix.

Ruby (Kasia Winter) is a stripper in a low-rent joint and under pressure to turn tricks from several of the club's goons, including Matt (René Zagger). Vincent (Giles Alderson) is a freshly turned bloodsucker on the prowl. A chance meeting between the two in a café ends in a bloody romp, followed quickly by relationship woes as the couple attempts to go "cold turkey" on the whole biting-people-and-drinking-their-blood thing, all while avoiding a beat-down from Ruby's ex-bosses, who consider her their property.

Night Junkies doesn't have action scenes or special effects. And it's not particularly scary. But if you like sleazy movies and don't mind the deliberate, theatrical British-style pacing, it does quite well for an independent picture of modest budget. Ruby and Vincent are like Sid and Nancy, totally screwed up



Ted Raimi (*Spiderman III*, *The Grudge*) and Ato Essandoh (*Blood Diamond*) star in this action-packed, science-fiction adventure in the vein of *Underworld* and *The Fifth Element*

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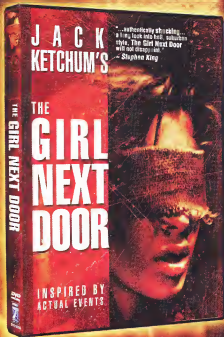
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OVERLOOKED, FORGOTTEN AND DISMISSED THIS ISSUE: LANCE LIVES CRAPPILY EVER AFTER

THE SIN IN CINDERELLA

CADAVRELLA

Brain Damage Films

If you've ever thought the classic *Cinderella* tale would benefit from strip-tears, motorcycles and reanimated corpses, you're in for a treat. In this version, Cinder's a young woman whose life falls to shit when her mom dies and her father marries a demented stripper intent on killing her before she can get her father's inheritance. Worse, Cinder's "Prince Charming" rapes and murders her, so her "Fairy Godmother" — a voodoo priest — raises her corpse from the dead to exact revenge. It's a very low-budget affair but a worthwhile watch due to some good gore, great dark humour and the fantastic twist of a zombie *Cinderella*. It's exactly the kind of tale the Brothers Grimm might have come up with... right after a three-day crack binge.

Body Count: 9

Attempted Murders Via Fishing Lure: 1



RED RIDING HOOD

MTI Home Video

If there's one thing I absolutely detest in horror movies, it's wise-ass kids! This Italian riff on the classic fairy tale features an annoying twelve-year-old girl and her wolf mask-wearing companion, who roam the streets of Rome with a drill and a nail gun, punishing evildoers for their sins. Although there are some decent gore scenes, including a particularly grisly nail-gunning and decapitation of a dentist and his sexy secretary, the film is plagued by bad acting and horrible musical numbers seemingly culled from an off-off-off Broadway play. Just make sure you watch it right to the end to see the young girl singing "Que Sera, Sera" with a zombie; you won't believe your eyes or ears.

Body Count: 7

Attempted Murders Via Peanut Butter: 1



ONCE UPON A CRIME...

CINDERELLA

Tartan Asia Extreme

The teen girl obsession with plastic surgery is baffling — nose jobs, face-lifts and breast implants should be reserved for aging Hollywood starlets, right? This Korean take on the *Cinderella* tale follows Yoon-Hae, a plastic surgeon whose daughter was horribly mutilated in a car fire. To save her, she kidnaps another child, surgically removes her face and grafts it onto her daughter, *Eyes Without a Face*-style. Years later, friends of the girl mysteriously commit suicide and the ghost of the dead child has returned to reclaim her mug. A *Cinderella* story in name only, there are no glass slippers or fairy Godmothers here, just long-haired ghost girls scuttling about, making weird sounds that'll have you wishing for a pumpkin carriage to take you far, far away.

Body Count: 5

Attempted Murders Via Birthday Cake: 1



Last Chance Lance

yet compellingly romantic. The dank alleyways of East London are suitably atmospheric; dreary and depressing. This slow grind of a story keeps itself from nodding off with occasional jolts of sex and violence, but not in any glamorous Hollywood way. For in Pearce's world, the true danger lurking about is not an undead monster but what individuals do to each other feed their needs.

Liisa Ladouceur

SELF-SABOTAGE

THE VICTIM

Starring Pitchanart Sakakorn,
Apasit Nitithon and Penpak Sirikul

Written and directed by
Monthon Arayangkoon
Tartan Video



Seeing a film whose promise is quashed by budgetary starvation or studio interference is a painful experience surpassed only by seeing a film sabotaged by its own creators. Such is the fate of Tartan's Thai head-scratcher *The Victim*.

The story revolves around Ting (Pitchanart Sakakorn), a fledgling actress whose big break is bestowed upon her by an unusual source: the local police department. If the film is to be believed, Thai officials employ a shocking investigative technique that involves having recently convicted felons of violent crimes return to the crime scene to re-enact their atrocities with actors. These re-enactments are gleefully photographed by a gaggle of paparazzi who ultimately feed the final product to the public. Writer/director Monthon Arayangkoon presents this practice as unswervingly real, then sets about exploring its moral and spiritual implications.

In order to appease her mounting guilt over "playing the dead," Ting prays for absolution from the souls of the victims she plays, a practice that brings trouble when she's hired to portray Meen, a slim supermodel whose death is shrouded in mystery. Meen's ghost begins to guide Ting toward the clues that finally unearth the truth behind her murder.

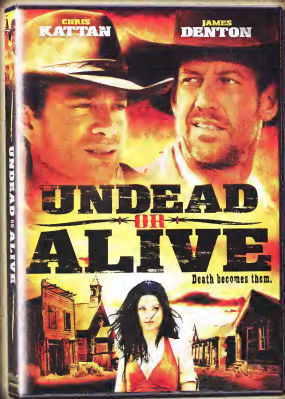
The first two-thirds of *The Victim* are solid; mood and tension are skillfully applied, it's engrossing, understated viewing, seasoned with some juicy slices of surrealism (a cascade of pale, dead faces gazing out from a darkened stairwell, an incense holder revealed to be the toes of a headless cadaver). But then — inexplicably — the film completely shifts gears and the remaining third is a tepid rehash of the same plot simply told in a different context, until an obvious climax finally puts the film out of its misery.

If nothing else, *The Victim* proves that a story well told is far more impacting than simply using the plot as a tool for cheeky, postmodern tinkering with the medium itself.

Richard Gavin



GUNS DON'T KILL PEOPLE... ZOMBIES KILL PEOPLE!



CHRIS KATTAN
Undercover Brother,
Corky Romano

JAMES DENTON
Primary Colors,
TV's Desperate Housewives

NAVI RAWAT
TV's Numb3rs,
House of Sand and Fog

Special Features

- Dolby Digital 5.1 Surround
 - "Making of" Featurettes
 - Commentary
 - Trailer
 - English and Spanish Subtitles
- (Special Features not rated and subject to change)



A n innocent cowboy, Luke (Saturday Night Live's Chris Kattan), with his reluctant new partner, Elmer (James Denton, *Desperate Housewives*), fleeces a crooked sheriff and attempt to disappear in the desert. Only Geronimo's smart and beautiful niece Sue (Navi Rawat, TV's *Numb3rs*) can help them break a mysterious Indian curse and escape from Sheriff Zombie's bloodthirsty posse.



THIS ZOMBEDY IS AVAILABLE ON DVD DECEMBER 11



R
Zombie Violence and Gore,
Language, and Brief Nudity
Supplemental Materials Not Rated

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HUNGRY, HUNGRY HORMONES

TEETH

Starring Jess Weider, John Hersley
and Hale Appleman

Written and directed by Mitchell Lichtenstein

You know, there's nothing more moving than a film that follows a teenage girl as she discovers the secrets of her vagina. Except maybe if she discovers that it's filled with razor-sharp teeth ready to devour anything thrust in there.

It takes a lot of guts to take the ancient myth of vagina dentata (translated as "the toothed vagina") and update it for a modern horror film, but that's exactly what Mitchell Lichtenstein did (impressive, seeing that his only other foray into directing was 2004's forgettable *Resurrection*).

Teeth follows Dawn (Jess Weider), a pretty but prudish Christian teen who spends her free time espousing the benefits of abstinence to her classmates and anyone else who will listen. However, she becomes morally conflicted when she falls for a boy at school and is confused by her new-found sexual feelings. When he forces himself on her during a trip to the local swimming hole, though, her thigh-trap springs into action, cutting off his member and making short work of him. All those years growing up in the shadow of the local nuclear plant have triggered some serious changes, it seems.

The film has plenty of uncomfortable yet comical moments for both men and women, including a gynecological exam that ends with the doctor's fingers being chopped off. Before long,

Down learns that she can use her body as a weapon and turns the tables on potential attackers and lechers, including her waste-case step-brother (www). Weider plays each hilarious yet horrifying scene

incredibly well in this female empowerment narrative that goes for the crotch of the stereotypical male predators that pervade most genre films but usually don't face such brutal comeuppance.

More comedy than horror, but featuring a top-notch score and some splendid gore, *Teeth* will have you squirming in your seat for all the right reasons.

Last Chance Lincee



BOY EATS GIRL

Starring David Leon, Samantha Mumba
and Deirdre O'Kane

Directed by Stephen Bradley
Written by Derek Landy

What were the good folks at The Irish Film Board thinking when they helped fund this heinous zombie/teen romance flick that portrays the Irish as a barely civilized tribe of homophobic, sexist, brawling drunken homdogs – and that's before they're turned into flesh-eating zombies by a voodoo spell gone wrong. No Celtic stereotype is left unmined here, including the bug-eyed priest who warns of the powers of darkness barely kept at bay by the Catholic Church.

Those warnings go unheeded by Grace (Deirdre O'Kane), a single mom who discovers an old book of voodoo in a collection of pagan relics confiscated by Catholic missionaries. After a series of coincidences and misunderstandings that would have embarrassed the writers of *Three's Company*, Grace uses the book to resurrect her lovesick teenage son Nathan (David Leon), who accidentally committed suicide after witnessing the object of his desires, Jessica (pop star Samantha Mumba), seemingly giving head to a local Lothario. Naturally, the resurrection spell has left Nathan with a taste for human flesh, a craving that he fights off as long as possible while his friends try to clear up the misunderstanding between him and his crush. When Nathan bites the high-school bully in a fight, though, the cannibal virus infects the town.

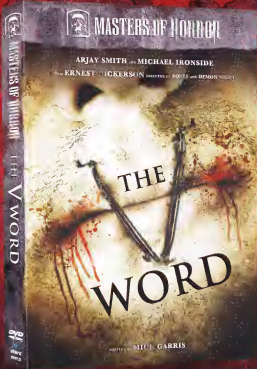
Director Stephen Bradley desperately tries to pull off an Irish version of the winning formula behind *Dead Alive* and *Shaun of the Dead*, which blended lovable goof-ball characters with plenty of witty social satire and local colour, especially the deep red hues. But with a script that makes *Van Wilder 2* read like an Oscar Wilde play and a lame series of derivative gore gags – including a shameless rip-off of *Dead Alive*'s death-by-garden-implements climax – the only one laughing is the leprechaun in a producer's hat who convinced the Film Board that a pot of gold lay at the end of this rainbow of celluloid malarkey.

James Grainger



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REISSUES



Twilight Zone: The Movie: Dan Aykroyd as an unquestionably non-lycanstrophic ghoul.

DAN AYKROYD IS NOT A WEREWOLF

TWILIGHT ZONE: THE MOVIE (1983)

Starring Dan Aykroyd, Albert Brooks and John Lithgow

Directed by Steven Spielberg, John Landis, Joe Dante, et al.

Written by Richard Matheson, Josh Rogan and George Clayton Johnson
Warner

I was sure Dan Aykroyd turned into a werewolf in *Twilight Zone: The Movie*. But no, he's just a bluish ghoul. Memories of certain films mutate as they incubate in the brain over the years, and like so many movies first watched on video, this one (finally on DVD) has been less polished by the sands of time than ground down by them.

Revisiting the world of the *Twilight Zone* TV show, the anthology begins with a classic morality tale of a modern-day bigot who walks out of a bar and into WWII, where he's hunted by Nazis, plopped into the Deep South to face a lynch-

ing, then spirited off to Vietnam (as an enemy soldier). Sadly, John Landis' segment is better known for killing its star, Vic Morrow, and two child extras in a helicopter accident. Using the existing footage, Landis (who also directed the prologue with Aykroyd and Albert Brooks in it) re-edited the story into a reasonably tense connoisseur tale that fits the TV show's tone.

The thrills grind to a halt, though, with Steven Spielberg's saccharine, border-free tale of a happy-go-lucky black man/cheesy stereotype (Scatman Crothers) arriving at an old folks home to turn them all back into children via a magical game of kick-the-can. With broad strokes and unwatchable flights of Peter Pan fancy, it's likely Spielberg never saw an episode of the *Zone*.

Joe Dante doesn't capture the ironic punishment element of TZ either, but his segment still entertains, as it features a needy boy recklessly using his god-like powers to trap his unwilling "family"

members in a life of watching cartoons, eating junk food dinners and suffering has pun-

ishments. Highlighted by a fantastic performance from Kevin McCarthy (who starred in the original *Invasion of the Body Snatchers*, as well as some classic TZ episodes) and creature FX by Rob Bottin, it pops with zany energy before its lame super-happy ending.

The final segment, courtesy of George Miller (the *Mad Max* trilogy), sees John Lithgow take over the role—played by Will Shutter in the original series—of a hysterical flyer who witnesses a creature tearing apart the engines of the plane he's on. Sweat-drenched and screaming, Lithgow hams it up to new heights (yes, literally) but it's consistent, plus that demon critter is just as freaky as remembered.

The extras-free disc offers a decent transfer, and you can skip Spielberg's hack-foolery altogether—BONUS! Now if they'd only release a Dan Aykroyd-turns-into-werewolf version...

Dave Alexander

CARPENTER ON THE TUBE

SOMEONE'S WATCHING ME! (1978)

Starring Lauren Hutton, David Birney and Adrienne Barbeau

Written and directed by John Carpenter
Warner

Made just before he changed the face of horror forever with *Halloween*, John Carpenter's *Someone's Watching Me!* is an entertaining *Rear Window*-inspired TV movie. An unlikely candidate for DVD treatment, this mostly unseen film offers a rare glimpse of the neophyte director experimenting with several of the techniques he would put to use in his classic slasher.

Lauren Hutton is simply outstanding as independent TV director Leigh Michaels, who moves to a fancy, uber-modern L.A. apartment building only to find herself the target of a voyeuristic stalker trying to drive her over the edge. Assailing her with a flurry of cryptic phone calls, the anonymous creep watches Leigh through a high-powered telescope from a high-rise across the street, bugs her room, and even controls the electricity and elevators in her apartment building. As the strong-willed and sexually empowered Leigh struggles under the pressure of being victimized, she enlists her boyfriend (David Birney) and sympathetic co-worker (Adrienne Barbeau) to expose her secret stalker.

Though lacking the visceral punch of a theatrically released film, *Someone's Watching Me!* is still a worthwhile suspenseur boasting well-written and realized characters. Carpen-



ic spends much of the running time toying with fluid camerawork, misdirection and POV shooting that, tellingly, owes as much to contemporary works like *Black Christmas* as it does to the Hitchcockian tradition.

More important, though, is the way *Someone's Watching Me!* not only stands up on its own, but feels so far ahead of its time. Although much of the technology that the stalker uses may seem crude today, the film still capably taps into fears over technology and privacy issues that we continue to struggle with now — which means it still works as an effective nail-brier for modern viewers.

Paul Corupe

VIVE LE SNOGGING

THE IRON ROSE (1973)

Starring Françoise Pascal,
Hughes Quester and Nathalie Parry
Directed by Jean Rollin
Written by Maurice Lemaître and Jean Rollin
Redemption USA

During the early '70s, Jean Rollin took a minor sidestep from Eurotic horror and crafted this alluring bridge between art film and Gothic horror without spilling a single crimson droplet.

Largely shot at night in a half-forgotten cemetery with eroding masonry and corroding crosses, *Iron Rose* is a simple tale of a youth who takes a quiet girl to the local necropolis for some private snogging. But after overstay-ing into the night, the couple is unable to navigate back to the main road, and becomes lost in the mausoleum, overgrown grounds.

Rollin exerts some cruel irony by transforming the erotic yet naïve girl into the cemetery's avatar of revenge, exacting payback for the boy's daytime taunts and pivotal decision to invade and defile the dusty stillness of a sacred crypt. Their petty squabbles and sudden bursts of rage, angst and passion don't really work — they're contrivances meant to give the slow story momentum — but then Rollin isn't trying to make a realist film.

The lovers' poetic exchanges are complemented by visual minutiae (carvings, crosses and decaying pits), which at first figure as atmospheric set décor but eventually evolve into constricting barriers that ultimately swallow the lovers whole.

Cinematographer Jean-Jacques Renon's elegant compositions and slow tracking shots augment the production's limited budget, although his evocations of dim moonlight are at times unintentionally comical, particularly when the actors pretend to feel their way along "midnight" paths, crisply



The Iron Rose: Jean Rollin's cemetery-set excursion into Gothic art house horror

lit by a nearby key light. The mono mix is tinny and very low, but the British-styled English subtitles are fairly faithful to the poetic French dialogue.

Likely to be lauded as a mini-masterpiece among fans, *Redemption USA's* DVD also includes Rollin's short, *Les Pays loins* (1965), which uses a similar narrative of lovers wandering among postwar ruins, capped by a sexual finale apparently snipped from this version (but evidenced in an accompanying stills gallery). *L'amour, Rollin-style!*

Mark R. Hagan

THUMBS DOWN

THE HAND (1981)

Starring Michael Caine,
Andrea Marcovici and Annie McEnroe
Directed by Oliver Stone
Written by Oliver Stone
Warner

Horror films featuring disembodied killer hands go right back to the silent era, from *Mad Love* and *The Hands of Orlac* right up to more recent efforts *Evil Dead 2* and *Idle Hands*. Though this early Oliver Stone attempt, based on the novel by Marc Brandell, follows in this time-honored horror tradition, it's one of the worst to ever grace the screen. Lacking the sly sense of humor needed for such an outrageous premise, *The Hand* is a thuddingly obvious, often tedious psychological study that's mostly all thumbs.

Michael Caine turns in a hysterically over-the-top performance as Jonathan Lansdale, a dour newspaper cartoonist whose drawing hand is severed in a car crash. Separating from his estranged wife (Andrea Marcovici) and losing his daily strip to an up-and-coming artist who wants to re-imagine his character,

Jonathan becomes unhinged and moves to California to take a cushy teaching job. Not to be left behind, his severed hand follows and begins acting as an extension of his emotional anger, crushing the windpipes of all those who betray him.

With *The Hand*, Stone works overtime to set up ambiguity about whether Caine is the one throttling his lovers and colleagues under the delusion that it's his killer appendage, or whether it really is the self-propelled hand that is to blame, but it's never quite successful. Perhaps this is because any attempts at serious emotional drama are always undermined by the inherent campiness of the situation, which viewers are reminded of every time one of Stan Winston's weak and badly dated hand effects appears onscreen. Fans and/or masochists will definitely want to check out the director's commentary, in which Stone attempts to defend some of his choices in what is clearly one of his biggest career missteps.

Paul Corupe



SEWER CHEWER

ALLIGATOR (1980)

Starring Robert Forster, Robin Riker
and Michael Gazzo
Directed by Lewis Teague
Written by John Sayles
Lionsgate

A breakout hit for Roger Corman's New World Pictures, *Pyramha* was undoubtedly one of the best B-creature flicks of the 1970s. *Alligator*, screenwriter John Sayles' like-minded follow-up, is basically more of the same giant monster schlock that mobbed





Anatomical mayhem ensues in this *Jaws*-inspired creature feature.

the multiplexes in *Jaws'* broad wake. Derivative? Definitely. But when it's from a writer of Sayles' calibre, that's not an entirely bad thing.

Playing off the urban legend about flushed reptiles living in sewers, *Alligator* hits all the expected plot points, as affable cop David Madison (Robert Forster) insists to his disbelieving captain (Michael Gazzo) that a rash of recent murders is due to a cranky, giant gator hiding underground. As David uncovers evidence that the creature has grown to massive proportions by eating growth hormone-laced dog carcasses cast off by a local laboratory, he falls in love with a spunky herpetologist (Robin Riker) and gets bounced from his job by the nervous mayor.

There's a lot to like about this generally entertaining creature feature. Though blood flows freely, Sayles' script smartly focuses on character development while balancing humour and social commentary. More than rising to the challenge, Robert Forster is convincingly natural and sympathetic as the downtrodden detective, and there's a scene-stealing cameo by Henry Silva as a cocky big game hunter intent on bagging himself a new pair of wingtips. Both actors add a touch of class.

If only the alligator itself was as good. The anatomical model may look fairly realistic as it skulks in the sewers awaiting the next plump city worker, but when it surfaces and is expected to actually move, it's not so convincing. Director Tengue, who later helmed the Stephen King adaptations *Cujo* and *Cat's Eye*, attempts to shoot around the stiffly construct-

ed monster and does manage some great POV shots with just the jaws peeking in from the corner of the frame, but aside from a few miniature set shots, the viewer never really gets a sense of the true size of the gator. Because of this, *Alligator* falls just short of the best of breed, but it's still a decent animal attack film.

Paul Corpe

OUT OF THIS WORLD

SPECIES (1995)

Starring Natasha Henstridge, Ben Kingsley and Michael Madsen
Directed by Roger Donaldson
Written by Dennis Feldman
MGM

When *Species* hit the big screen back in the summer of 1995 it was a hit, and not just because it was an effects-laden thriller with a brilliant ensemble cast led by Ben Kingsley, Michael Madsen, Forest Whitaker and Alfred Molina. Instead, its popularity stemmed from the fact that it was also the debut for mega-hot supermodel Natasha Henstridge, who would be playing the lead role of a sexy alien... mostly sans-clothing.

The movie centred around the idea that instead of visiting Earth in a spaceship, an alien race made contact with humanity by sending us a coded genetic sequence that scientists could use to

synthesize an alien/human hybrid - culminating in the creation of a female named Sil (Henstridge). But when it is decided to terminate her, she becomes violent and escapes the facility, fuelled by a deadly, instinctual urge to procreate.

The best thing about most DVD reissues is the extras that they pack into them, and this two-disc set is no exception. Beyond the standard behind-the-scenes featurettes and still photo galleries, there are also some very informative interviews with genetic researchers explaining the science behind the movie.

The biggest highlight, however, is a twelve-minute feature with the man who created Sil: H.R. Giger. Not only does it show some of the production meetings discussing Sil's alien appearance, it also follows the Swiss genius around his house and work studio as he shows off his latest creations.

Also included is a "lost" alternate ending, originally slated to appear after the infamous "not sequence," depicting a touching moment between Michael Madsen and Marg Helgenberger's characters. Coinciding with the release of *Species IV: The Awakening*, this is a must for fans of Giger, Henstridge's magnificent breasts and those who like their cerebral sci-fi with side of gore.

Last Chance Lance

VULETIDE SLASHER

SILENT NIGHT, DEADLY NIGHT (1984)

Starring Robert Brian Wilson, Lyan Chauvin and Linnea Quigley
Directed by Charles E. Sellier, Jr.
Written by Paul Caimi and Michael Hickey
Sony

There haven't been many horror films that were met with such outrage as *Silent Night, Deadly Night*. The 1984 slasher flick about an axe-wielding psychopath in a Santa suit on a Vuletide killing spree features sadistic rape, rape, mutilation and just about everything else to please gorehounds and erage parents.

The film follows Billy, who as an eight-year-old witnessed the slaying of his parents by a maniac in a Saint Nick suit. Raised in a strict Roman Catholic orphanage, he was taught by nuns that Kriss Kringle was an entity of evil and



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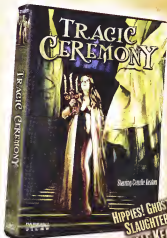
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Silent Night, Deadly Night: A *Nativity* slasher classic that deserves a better DVD release

punishment rather than a symbol of cheer and goodwill. Flash forward a decade to when eighteen-year-old Billy is forced to play the jolly old bastard at the toy store where he works. Once in costume, he snaps and embarks on a rampage to punish the "naughty" with his axe.

Having spawned four flaccid sequels, this is definitely the best of the bunch, a wickedly fun movie with some good over-the-top gore, a healthy dose of gratuitous sleaze and solid performances, not to mention a half-naked Linnea Quigley (*Return of the Living Dead*) impaled on deer antlers.

Even though its short-lived box office run was incredibly successful (it was made for only \$750,000 and had already earned \$1.8 million in its first three days), it was pulled by TriStar after just two weeks and had its West Coast run cancelled in an effort to quell citizens groups and critics who were protesting it.

At nearly 85 minutes, this release is touted as the most complete and uncut version available yet. Culled from two different film elements which were used during production, the result betrays the varying quality of the different sources, but only slightly.

Sony's bare-bones release is unfortunate, though, especially for such a controversial film. The only extras are a stills gallery and a lamp feature titled *Santa's Stocking of Outrage*, which is nothing more than a few dozen letters and reviews from critics. The 35-minute audio interview with director Charles E. Sellier Jr. reminiscing about the film makes the whole package slightly better than getting a lump of coal for Christmas—but not by much.

Last Chance Lance

DEVIL MUZAK

BLACK ROSES (1988)

Starring John Martin, Ken Swofford and Julie Adams
Directed by John Fasano
Written by Cindy Crile
Synopsis

Say it with me now, "Damien! Damien! Damien!" John Fasano's axe-grinding follow-up to *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*, *Black Roses* is another low-budget car crash of Satanism, loud guitars and (of course) evil puppets that dares to ask one of the most important questions of our time. No, not the one about whether rock music is the recruiting tool of the devil, but rather, can

this '80s heavy metal horror flick hold up without its legendary puffy VHS box art?

In the film, superstar metal sensation Black Roses is about to kick off its first live tour ever, and the tiny suburb of Mill Basin gets the honour of hosting dates. The community's kids can't wait to feather their hair and rock out, but their parents are outraged, especially after they read some of *Black Roses'* vaguely anti-social lyrics. Supportive English teacher Mr. Moorhouse (John Martin) and the mayor succeed in calming the PTA but the day after the concert, the kids begin acting strange—daydreaming in class, fighting and bashing their stepfathers' heads in with ashtrays.

It's hard to resist throwing up at least one devil horn salute for *Black Roses*, a film that aptly captures that magical time in the late 1980s when horror and heavy metal had a brief but intense fling at the local multiplex. Where Fasano's film differs, however, is that the town's grumpy, rock 'n' roll-hating parents are ultimately right all along—power chords and monster ballads really do turn teenagers into unwilling minions of the Prince of Darkness! It's an odd inconsistency, since the rest of the film is clearly enmeshed with rock and rebellion, and even features music by Lizzy Borden and King Kobra, as well as a cameo by ex-Vanilla Fudge/Ozzy drummer Carmine Appice as one of the demonic band members.

A notable improvement over the thrift store production values of *Rock 'n' Roll Nightmare*, *Black Roses* may work best as a time capsule of the era, but it's still goofy enough to entertain, especially since Fasano seems to be in on the joke this time out. Just witness the film's highlight: *The Supranos'* Vincent "Big Pussy" Pastore, in his acting debut, gobbled up headfirst by a pulsating, demonic stereo speaker—a bizarre scene that is a far better selling point than all the embossed cardboard slipcases in the world.

Paul Corpe



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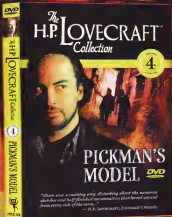
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BY PAUL CORUPE

DING!
DING!
DING!
DING!

GAMERA, SUPER MONSTER (1980)

BIRTHPLACE: JAPAN
 MASS: 80,000 TONNES
 SIGNATURE MOVE: FLYING SHELL SPLASH

VS

THEY CAME FROM BEYOND SPACE (1967)

BIRTHPLACE: UK
 MASS: 493 - 886 ELECTRON VOLTS PER PHOTON
 SIGNATURE MOVE: BRAIN BURROW

One of the hardened veterans of the creature feature circuit, Gamera may have seen better days, but he's been ripe for a comeback ever since Toho started releasing his phone calls. Gamera, Super Monster recycles fight footage from his first seven features, bringing back all his past adversaries for another series of bloody bouts. It's a nice reminder of past glories, sure, but can Gamera still take on evil aliens and maintain his friendship with all children in what could be his farewell performance? No one seems to know, but teaming up with three cheerful space women may just give him the competitive edge he needs. Meanwhile, America's wooden intergalactic invasion flick *They Came From Beyond Space* has been keeping a regular training schedule, as its crack team of ultraviolet aliens takes control of the minds and bodies of British scientists in order to take over Earth. It's going to be tough to put a beam of light in a suplex, but with early rumours indicating that the UV attackers are having difficulty getting past other players, the smart money's on the gigantic, city-smashing turtle.



Here's our pick for the week. A long-time favorite with the fans, Jeff Lieberman's renowned *Blue Sunshine* has been hitting the bags with the tale of a wrongly accused man (Zaiman King) who links a rash of brutal killings to the after-effects of a strain of bad LSD taken by Stanford University students a decade earlier. Through *Blue Sunshine*'s effects are a tad shaky, Lieberman assures us that the film's schizophrenic nature is bound to catch its opponent off guard - you're shaking hands with a political campaign manager one minute, dodging a chrome-domed homicidal maniac the next. Trying to avoid this deadly dose of brown acid, *Monstro* is prepared to serve up Jim Mithum as a chemical company troubleshooter who heads to South America to deal with a giant sea serpent that his corrupt bosses may have helped create. Long considered one of B-movie's most abysmal cinematic works, the Wesee knock-off *Monstro* has been unable to win anything but laughter and derision from audiences due

to its homemade plastic costume and an absurd insistence that it's "based on a true story." It's our hope that *Blue Sunshine* will rise high in the sky and finally sink *Monstro* to the bottom of the Loch where it belongs.

BLUE SUNSHINE (1976)

BIRTHPLACE: USA
 MASS: 150 MICROGRAMS
 SIGNATURE MOVE: THE WIG-OFF WIG-OUT

VS

MONSTROID (1979)

BIRTHPLACE: COLOMBIA
 MASS: 2500 POUNDS (ESTIMATED)
 SIGNATURE MOVE: CRYPTO CANNONBALL

MANEATER OF HYDRA (1967)

BIRTHPLACE: SPAIN
 MASS: 85 POUNDS (INCLUDING FOLIAGE)
 SIGNATURE MOVE: CHLOROPHYLL CHOKER

VS

THE HOUSE THAT SCREAMED (1969)

BIRTHPLACE: SPAIN
 MASS: 2208 SQUARE FEET
 SIGNATURE MOVE: HAZING HAMMERLOCK

These two swingers '60s Spanish competitors finally get a shot at each other in a match being billed as the "Clash in Bescap." *Maneater of Hydra*'s leafy offense involves tourists vacationing at a vaguely Mediterranean island resort run by a mysterious Baron (Cameron Mitchell), who suddenly become victims of his gruesome greenhouse. With a previous starring role in *Little Shop of Horrors* under his belt, writer/director Mel Welles will be ringside for the fight, but his lack of experience on the other side of the ropes could be a deciding factor, as sequences of Mitchell tenderly coddling plants are creepy for all the wrong reasons. Of course, the only thing deadlier than *Maneater of Hydra*'s carnivorous tree is its yawn-inducing plot, which has been known to put opponents in a sleeper hold as early as the first round. In contrast, *The House That Screamed* (nicknamed by fans as "The Yellin' Dwellin'") has always been obsessed with technique - almost narcissistically - as girls at a boarding school find themselves terrorized by an unknown killer. Oddsmakers indicate that *The House That Screamed* may be slow and overly reserved out the gate, foregoing a quick attack of Gothic terror for pronounced shower scenes and gratuitous whipping footage, but look for a late burst of energy and gore to push it to an easy and decisive victory.



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FOX HORROR CLASSICS COLLECTION REDISCOVERS
THE FORGOTTEN GENIUS OF **JOHN BRAHM**.

FREUDIAN FRIGHTS

BY PAUL CORUPE

While Val Lewton and his team of directors at RKO were putting audiences on edge in the 1940s by keeping onscreen horror ambiguously perched between the real and the imagined, Twentieth Century-Fox's John Brahm was just as busy on the other side of town diving into the twisted psyche of murderers and maniacs. Drawing on the stark, Expressionist style of Fritz Lang and the talents of a young up-and-coming actor named Laird Cregar, Brahm directed *The Undying Monster*, *The Lodger* and *Hangover Square*, a trio of fascinating '40s psychological shockers which have finally debuted on home video as the Fox Horror Classics Collection.

Though not fully realized, Brahm's talent for shot composition and atmosphere is clearly evident in his first crack at the horror genre, 1942's *The Undying Monster*. In this 58-minute Poe-influenced piece, the police are baffled by mysterious deaths at an old English manor, especially when coarse hair found at the scene seems to indicate an escaped zoo animal. Trading annoying wisecracks, detective team Cornelius Christopher (Heather Thatcher) and Robert Curtis (James Ellison) are dispatched by Scotland Yard, and soon uncover a family legend of lycanthropy. *The Undying Monster* may be a cheaply made quickie, but it's still visually rich; the foggy, evocative sets and impressive Gothic interiors lend an undeniably spooky air to the affair. Best of all, though, there really is a werewolf on the

loose, a supernatural twist that sets it apart from the phony spooks that inhabited most "old dark house" films of the era.

Ultimately, though, *The Undying Monster* is really no more than a test run for some of the stylistic flourishes that mark Brahm's masterpiece, *The Lodger*. Brahm took a notably Freudian approach to this Jack the Ripper story—first filmed by Alfred Hitchcock as a silent film in 1927—and created a beautiful and tragic classic that clearly anticipates *Psycho* and the psychological horror films that dominated the 1960s. Appearing in his first Brahm film, Cregar is brilliant as Slade, the mysterious figure who rents a room from

a kindly old couple at the height of the Ripper murders. His strange nocturnal habits and infatuation with their dance hall performer daughter, Kitty (Marie O'Brien), arouse the suspicion of the family, and soon the police. Seething with sexual menace, Slade is a man dominated by his obsessions, not the least of which is a lustful fixation on his own dead brother, who was led to ruin by a

beautiful actress himself. It's these dark corners of the human soul that are further brought out by Brahm's shadowy cinematography, with gas lights shining through misty Victorian London back alleys. Subtle and evocative touches help Brahm and Cregar's collaboration rank as one of the finest Jack the Ripper films ever produced.

Cregar gives another compelling exploration of the psyche of a serial killer in Brahm's follow-up, *Hangover Square*. This time, he plays George Bone, a piano composer who succumbs to an unconscious murder-

ous trance when he hears loud noises, and struggles to both grasp and conceal what he may have done. While not quite as engaging as *The Lodger*, the final reel of *Hangover Square* is a stunner, featuring a technically arresting sequence that elevates the film far beyond other B-programmers. As Bone performs a piano concerto, the camera fluidly swoops and spirals through the audience and the accompanying orchestra in long, complex tracking shots, finally plunging down on the pianist as the music triggers memories of his brutal killings. Each camera movement and malevolent flashback is further synchronized with composer Bernard Herrmann's enthralling eleven-minute long discordant musical piece, sound and image coming together in a violent and thrilling clash of emotion, pathos and terror.

Despite the intensity of both *The Lodger* and *Hangover Square*, tragic circumstances prevented Cregar and Brahm from claiming their rightful place in horror cinema history. Fearing he would be typecast as a villain after starring in these films, the heavyset Cregar began a series of crash diets and surgery designed to mold him into a romantic lead. He suffered a fatal heart attack shortly after wrapping *Hangover Square*—he was not even 30-years-old at the time. Brahm, seemingly at the height of his talents, turned his back on the genre shortly thereafter, and except for Vincent Price's 1954 3-D outing *The Mad Magician*, never returned to horror, choosing to escape into the generally anonymous world of TV production. As this overdue DVD set proves, however, Brahm was almost as daring as Lewton's RKO unit when it came to pushing the limits of the genre, and Fox Horror Classics Collection stands as a testament to his unique achievements. **B**



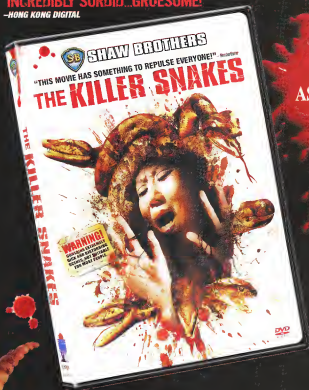
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WHAT THE KATZMAN
DROGGED IN

THE WEREWOLF (1956)

Starring Steven Ritch, Don Megowan
and Joyce Holden

Directed by Fred F. Sears
Written by Robert E. Kent
Sony

Along with Roger Corman and Samuel Z. Arkoff, Sam Katzman was one of the few Hollywood players that could truly lay claim to a title like "King of the Bs." But while most trash film fans are only too familiar with Corman and AIP's extensive catalogue of schlock, Katzman has remained a comparatively obscure figure, despite his long reputation as one of the canniest B-unit moguls of the studio era.

Over his 40-year career, Katzman worked himself up from a lowly studio gopher to a prolific producer of low-budget fare, having a hand in no less than 240 films. Willing to hop on any current trend or headline-making news story, he covered almost every conceivable angle in the low-budget film biz, bouncing from serials to tangleweed westerns, on to costume dramas and exotic adventure films, which earned him the nickname "Jungle Sam." It was on contract at Columbia in the 1940s and '50s, however, that Katzman mounted some of his most widely seen work, including *It Came from Beneath the Sea* and *Earth vs. the Flying Saucers*, both of which featured effects work from Ray Harryhausen. The hard-working producer also made several more sci-fi tinged horror films within this period, which have now been collected on Sony's *Icons of Horror Collection: Sam Katzman*, which highlights four of Jungle Sam's better mid-century chillers: *The Werewolf*, *The Giant Claw*, *Zombies of Mora Tia* and *Creature with the Atom Brain*.

Although all these titles are decent programmers, *The Werewolf* is the best of the set. Sporting thrashbare production values, wooden acting and an overreliance on scientific mumbo jumbo, it's in many ways a typical Katzman picture, but it does successful-



The Werewolf updates the lycanthrope for the Nuclear Age

ly update the mythic monster for the nuclear age. The action begins in the snowy mountains of Montana, as a series of brutal murders occur in a small town after the arrival of apparent amnesiac Duncan Marsh (Steven Ritch). Straight-talking sheriff Jack Haines (Don Megowan) isn't sure if the killings are caused by man or beast, but after Marsh comes out of hiding in the woods and confesses that he isn't sure of who — or what — he is, Haines suspects that a werewolf really is on the loose.

Where Universal's trend-setting lycanthropy films *Werewolf of London* and *The Wolfman* played into apprehension about Christianity, challenging foreign superstitions and evolutionary concepts that painted a thin line between civilized humanity and bestial chaos, *The Werewolf* is very much a product of the atom bomb-paranoia 1950s. As Haines tracks down the creature looking for answers, a pair of scientists (S. John Lauer and George Lynn) also arrive to cover up their dirty work — it seems they rescued Marsh after a car crash, only to pump him full of radioactive wolf's blood in a misguided experiment to see if humans could be inoculated against the effects of fallout. Now they must destroy him before they're held responsible for the actions of the laboratory-made monster.

Picturesque wintry locations add a natural and realistic feel to *The Werewolf*, but what

really makes it worth catching is Steven Ritch's performance. Though he never did much else beyond bit roles in TV shows and Katzman B-westerns, Ritch's thoughtful and tragic portrayal of Marsh lends some much-needed heart to the low-budget affair, even as he drools and slobbers through some thrifty wolf makeup. Since his transformation is triggered by anger towards others rather than phases of the moon, Marsh is almost hysterical at the thought of what he may have done, as he wakes up in caves, covered in blood and surrounded by mysterious paw prints. When his wife and son join the Sheriff and beg Marsh to give himself up, Ritch makes it clear his character has lost the post-war American dream, everything in his life is gone and things will never be the same again. It's a big change from the cursed plight of Lon Chaney Jr.'s Larry Talbot, who must isolate himself from the ones he loves because they are in the most danger of becoming his victims, but it's almost just as poignant given Ritch's performance.

An unorthodox but very much welcome classmate horror release, *Icons of Horror Collection: Sam Katzman*, and its star attraction, *The Werewolf*, should go a long way in making the talented producer a household name among horror aficionados — and that's something to howl about.

Paul Corupe

Terrifyingly good.



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CAME FROM BOWEN'S BASEMENT



DRIVE-INS, DELETE BINS AND OTHER SINS

HARD TIME WITH RENNY HARLIN
by John W. Bowen

"Renny Harlin just doesn't understand how to make a scary movie, despite having a bunch of them on his resume." Thus spoke my brother-in-severed-arms Aaron Van Lupton in *RMK62*. And who am I to argue? The mighty Luptonius was reviewing Harlin's tedious teen bawdle-fest *The Covenant* at the time, but he was quick to back up that brickbat with a litany of the Finnish philistine's previous crimes against our beloved genre: *Nightmare on Elm Street 4*, *Deep Blue Sea* and — fallen saints preserve us! — *Exorcist: The Beginning*. Worse, Harlin's also responsible for a much longer list of equally overblown and underwhelming action-thrillers along the lines of *Carthage Island*, *The Long Kiss Goodnight* and *Minutemen*.

A little perspective: when even Mick Garris, a.k.a. *The Most Unflinching Good-Natured Man* in the Horror Flick Biz, openly stags you in his novel *Development Hell* (*RMK65*), maybe you should reconsider a career in hyena husbandry. But I come neither to bury Harlin nor to praise his general body of work; I merely ask that you cast off your preconceived notions and check out his one truly kick-ass horror film. All we are say-ing is give *Prison* (1988) a chance.

Paranoia, brutality, deceit and despair live at the centre of many horror films, but they also make up the day-to-day backdrop of prison life, and for all of *Prison*'s excruciating violence and elaborate effects, it's the all-too-real horror of incarceration that ultimately makes it more unsettling than many of its peers. When the crumbling Wyoming State Penitentiary at Rawlins (where much of the film was actually shot) is reopened to accommodate an overflow of inmates, the spirit of Charlie Forsythe — wrongfully executed decades earlier for a murder he didn't commit — is unleashed from the death chamber.

The real guilty party is a former guard, brutal throwback Ethan Sharpe (Lane Smith), who is now the new warden. Only elderly lifer Cressus (Lincoln Kipstrand) knows his secret, as he had



helped Sharpe cover-up the incident. So, when he winds up sharing a cell with car thief Burke (a very pre-fame Viggo Mortensen — hey ladies!) who happens to bear an uncanny resemblance to Forsythe, Cressus fears the past is finally catching up with him as a series of horrific and largely inexplicable deaths shock even the most hardened cons and custodians.

It's tempting to describe this effects-heavy film as typical post-*Elm Street* rubber-reality horror, given its most basic premise: an ensemble cast under attack by an angry, vengeful spirit who can walk into our world at will and seemingly manipulate any inanimate object as a weapon to waste the righteous and the wicked alike. One inmate is roasted alive when his isolation cell inexplicably turns into a gigantic oven, another is attacked and torn apart by pipes and cables during a late-night escape attempt, and, in a sequence that would surely give Dario Argento a boner, a sadistic guard meets a protracted and painful demise as he's slowly mummified in barbed wire.

Yet despite its '80s vintage, *Prison* is by no means another failed attempt to launch a Freddy Krueger-type franchise villain (Wes Craven's *Shocker*, anyone?). In fact, we only see Charlie Forsythe (also played by Mortensen) briefly. In an opening flashback to his execution, his face is covered; later in the film, he's seen as a rotting

corpse, from a distance of about twenty feet, and we never hear him speak. With uncharacteristic common sense, Harlin instead keeps Forsythe a largely abstract presence, an element that lives and breathes in every inch of this infernal hothole. And while the effects are impressive and often daring, *Prison* is more remarkable for its extraordinarily strong cast of character actors you'll likely recognize, if not know by name.

Your beloved cellar dweller's prime directives are not only to tirelessly excavate and spelunk in search of overlooked treasures, but also to exonerate the unjustly maligned, and in this case I feel like I'm doing a bit of both. And you, Constant Reader, must also do your part: deluge Anchor Bay, Blue Underground, Elite, Dark Sky and their ilk with polite yet urgent admonitions that *Prison* be dusted off, holed down and digitized. Write angry letters to newspapers, harass your local Member of Parliament or congressman, set yourself on fire in the parking lot of the nearest Blockbuster Video — this flick needs to be sprung from its delete bin dungeon by any means necessary.

Yes, Virginia — sorry, I mean Von Lupton — there really is a worthwhile Renny Harlin film, if you can actually find the fucking thing. Now get the hell out of my basement and make a beeline to the nearest (preferably independent) video store.



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IN THIS ISSUE!

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PROOF #1-3

Alexander Grecian and Riley Rossmo Image

SHAZAM! THE MONSTER

SOCIETY OF EVIL HC

Jeff Smith DC

oftentimes approach this column with an attitude of digging for gold. Without meaning to disparage an undeniably well-meaning industry, suffice to say that frequently I have to dig quite deep and look where others are not searching. And when I hit the proverbial vein (an apt double metaphor), it enriches my life. Hopefully yours, too.

To that point, allow me present *The Arrival*, an extraordinary graphic novel by Australian artist Shaun Tan. It's a wordless, Kafkaesque horror about a man struggling to reunite with his family in a world gone to surreal chiaroscuro hell – at least, that's what I saw when I devoured it. But here's what makes the book a true *Rue* discovery: not only is it being aimed at students (publisher's recommended age bracket: 10-18), but the author's intention is that the story be interpreted as a metaphor for the immigrant experience.

Fair enough. Shaun Tan created *The Arrival*, so he can decide what it's primarily about. There is no debating the veracity of his model or his metaphor, on its intended level. *The Arrival* remains a complete success. On a sub-conscious level, though, Tan has inadvertently created one of the finest horror comics of the year.

Consider the first chapter alone, which follows the nameless protagonist's fearful yet hopeful parting from his wife and daughter. It spans a mere ten pages but could easily stand as a complete horror story of its own. Tan first deploys multi-panel layouts to establish the thoughtful, reluctant process of the man packing his suitcase. The artist then deftly cuts to a full-page splash of the wife's hand covering her husband's atop the closed case. Now, another multi-panel sequence shows the child waking up and everyone getting ready to see daddy off. Tan then cuts to a full-page splash of the family proceeding down the street.

Ordinary enough stuff... with the exception of the shadow of a giant spiked tendril licking the brick wall behind them (pictured).

Clearly, we're not in Kansas anymore, and Tan himself is the tornado that hits us time and again in *The Arrival*. He works his verse/chorus approach to great effect throughout the book, using multi-panels and splash combinations to disorient the reader as effectively as he does his protagonist. The main story follows the husband to his new home across a misted ocean, where he must learn the ways and customs of a society where baffling and insidious sights lurk around every corner. In a thoughtful essay on Tan's excellent website (shauntan.net), the author states that for any immigrant, "even the most basic details of ordinary life are strange, confronting or confusing – not to mention beyond the grasp of language." Hence the fact that this graphic novel is wordless in addition to being strange, confrontational and (delightfully) confusing.

Back to the first chapter, though, and Tan's impeccable sense for the horror of the page turn. Immediately following the portentous tendril splash, the artist produces shock upon shock: a double-page spread showing a dozen square city blocks, ludicrous tentacles swirling everywhere. Perhaps the most frightening aspect of this image is the writhing horror's complete lack of effect on the family.

The chapter ends at a train station, with another multi-panel sequence leading to a heart-moving letting go of hands, and the disappearing into the fog of the husband's train. Cut to the final splash: mother and



Arm of Darkness: Horror as an apt metaphor for social oppression in Shaun Tan's outstanding *The Arrival*

daughter resignedly returning home, the monstrosities looming ahead of them. Call the horror a metaphor for social oppression if you want, it's just as powerful without an explanation or a context, and this is the genius of Tan's book.

As he explains on his site, Tan is aware of the obvious existential applications of his chilling story. "Beyond any personal issues, I think that the 'problem' of belonging is perhaps more of a basic existential question that everybody deals with from time to time, if not on a regular basis. It especially rises to the surface when things 'go wrong' with our usual lives, when something challenges our comfortable reality or defies our expectations – which is typically the moment when a good story begins, so good fuel for fiction." **R**



QUICK CUTS

REVIEWS BY DAVE ALEXANDER, GARY BUTLER,
ERIC CHARTY AND MARK NOTES

Available now as a limited edition 334-page hardcover, *Alan Moore's Yuggoth Cultures and Other Growls* is an odds 'n' ends

collection for hardcore fans of the comic book legend. If you didn't pick up the original 2003 three-issue miniseries or the recent soft-cover collection, the HC boasts 50 additional pages; add to this the fact that it's oversized, and it's clearly the one to get.

It's crammed with mostly horror – most of it Lovecraftian – in the form of partially finished stories, notes, letters, essays and scripts. It also includes the first issue of the aborted Moore/Talbot dark magic (pre-*Hellblazer*) series *Nightjar* and remnants of the unrealized *Yuggoth Cultures* novel (which died after Moore left most of it in a taxi cab). Some of this amounts to mere curiosities from a then-developing artist. On the other hand, some of the more Old Ones-centric entries are steeped in Moore's poetic madness, and brought to life by Juan Jose Ryp's jaw-droppingly detailed art. Can I get a "Yuggoth?" **DA**

Jill is stuck in a go-nowhere relationship, until one night when she's struck by the urge to devour human brains. She recovers, but not before she has nibbled on boyfriend Steve's cerebellum, and since the guy decides to hold a grudge, *Eating Steve* turns out to be more of a break-

up story (in fact, it's subtitled "A Love Story"). As Jill tries to build a new life as a singleton, she finds herself caught in a blooming love triangle with a bunky TV producer and a bashful young farmer. That's right, it's zombieified chick lit, but creator J. Marc Schmidt's light touch with both humour and illustration proves that romantic angst and the frontal lobe are two great tastes that go great together. **EG**

"All this agony for a woman..." We've been teased for years now with allusions to the back story that made Eric Powell's *Goon* the hardcase that he is. Finally, *Goon Chinatown* is upon us, in a standalone graphic novel format, allowing the epic to unfold sans interruption. No surprise that at its core, this story – which opens with the fair warning "This Ain't Funny" – is a tale of character-defining heartbreak

and eternally misdirected rage. So why is my own flannish heart a little bruised after reading this book? I was expecting something unpredictable, like a barrel of big bloody beefsteaks with a side of fried zombie knuckles (and a knife or five to the eye), but instead I got this made-to-order Chi-food combo. A beautiful plate, as always, but though this reader's 200 pages full, he's ultimately unsatisfied. **GB**

Clash of the Bigfoots. That's the book for the first story are of *Proof*, a comic about a secret government agency tasked with keeping cryptids – creatures whose existence is suspected but unproven – in peaceful cohabitation with their human neighbours. There's something remarkably non-seary about Sasquatches [see you –Ed], so it's wise of the creators to cast the

traditional hairy giant as a good-guy agent and rewrite the mythology to make a bad guy out of the Chupacabra, which writer Alexander Grecian playfully (and with some license) dubs the "Mexican Bigfoot." The tone starts gimmicky, with a constant stream of cryptid trivia verging on becoming a paper version of *Pop-Up Video*, but that said, when *Proof* gets its hands dirty reimagining folklore (e.g. the goatsucker's cave of human skins), things get tasty. **MM**

Not a horror offering. DC's super-smart reboot of one of its oldest characters is nonetheless rife with horrific flourishes that mix seamlessly with elements of pulp action, comedy, cartoony violence and all-ages morality. In other words, like his comic opus *Bone*, Jeff Smith's *Shazam! The Monster Society of Evil* truly has something for everyone, making it an exceptionally well-

executed tale in any subgenre. To the horror monsters do indeed run the streets in this pre-apocalypse scenario, some of them humanoid animals, others twin-towering robots that are clear metaphors for the World Trade Center (as well as a

deft homage to Smith's "stupid rat creatures" from, yes, *Bone*). The creepiest detail is a perhaps-unintentional nod to Clive Barker's "In the Hills, the Cries," whereby legions upon legions of insects are summoned to drive the gigantic robots, resulting in alter ego Billy Batson becoming trapped inside to literally drown in cockroaches. **GB**



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hollywood horror from the director's chair

Simon A. Wilkinson
McFarland

Like many of the sequels he focuses on in his book, Simon A. Wilkinson doesn't really offer fans anything new. However, *Hollywood Horror from the Director's Chair* does present a provocative, third-party examination of some of modern horror's most beloved franchises.

Wilkinson explores how series such as *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre* and even *The Blair Witch Project* have basically been adopted as bastard sons by big studios that are more interested in profit than creativity, and what these franchises have done to the careers of their directors, with many of them finding themselves pigeonholed in the genre as a result. Though he focuses primarily on a few filmmakers—Wes Craven, Don Coscarelli and Joe Berlinger (*Book of Shadows: Blair Witch 2*) among them—Wilkinson also includes a number of other directors who have worked regularly in and out of the genre such as Larry Cohen (*J.R. Alive*) and Tommy Lee Wallace (*Halloween III: Season of the Witch*).

Wilkinson obviously knows his stuff, and while there are ample references here to nearly every fear franchise, the majority of the book comes off as muddling at the studios, particularly since the author relies almost entirely on interviews from third-party magazines and other industry publications. In these



excerpts, the directors blame producers, studio executives and budget limitations for the various shortcomings in their movies. *Hollywood Horror*'s major downfall lies in the fact that Wilkinson didn't contact any of the directors himself. It would have been nice to see the author bounce his thesis off some of his subjects, allowing them to react to his conclusions.

Without this interaction, much of the book reads like an explanation of how studios and producers treat these franchises simply as cash cows—something horror fans are already well aware of. Wilkinson's ability to paint the directors as victims rather than guilty partners nonetheless makes for an interesting approach. Readers will inevitably feel sympathy for the men behind the camera as the author documents how meddling by the higher-ups can change a director's vision.

While not likely to become its own literary franchise, *Hollywood Horror* makes a decent enough one-shot and may shed some light on why *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre 3* sucked so hard.

W. Brice McVicar

grimm pictures: fairy tale archetypes in eight horror and suspense films

Walter Rankin
McFarland

Dust off your copy of *Grimm's Fairy Tales* because it's a safe bet that once you're through with Walter Rankin's book you're



going to want to revisit it. On first look, Rankin's *Grimm Pictures* seems like a stretch; he takes eight films (*The Silence of the Lambs*, *Scream*, *The Ring*, *The Talented Mr. Ripley*, *Aliens*, *Rosemary's Baby*, *What Lies Beneath* and *Misery*) and examines how each movie follows the set-up of one of the classic fairy tales.

Comparing *The Ring* to "Rapunzel" sounds ridiculous, but through detailed plot synopsis, character study and examinations of the similarities between the stories, Rankin pulls it off in an entertaining and educational fashion. He also accounts for what the Grimms would have been exposed to in their lives and how it is reflected in their tales.

Each chapter is dedicated to one movie and its corresponding fairy tale. Here, Rankin examines the films' plots to show how elements from those centuries-old children's stories are still used today. A particular standout is the chapter highlighting *Aliens* and "Cinderella," in which Rankin thoughtfully compares Ripley's battle with the alien Queen to that of the poor girl whose evil stepmother and stepsisters will do anything to prevent her from marrying the prince.

Rankin is exceptionally well versed when it comes to both the stories he's dissecting and the films he compares them to. The book is an easy and enjoyable read, with prose that never becomes overly academic; He also avoids falling into the trap of assuming his readers share his extensive

The Grim Reader

DARK HARVEST
Norman Partridge
for

It's Halloween night and young Pete McCormick has one thing on his mind: Kill the October Boy. If he succeeds, the pumpkin-headed monstrosity will be dead forever and Pete can finally escape his hellhole of a hometown. From *Slasher Award*-winner Norman Partridge takes readers on a fast-paced fright ride that's nearly impossible to put down.



Last Chance Lance

THE MONSTER HUNTERS HANDBOOK
Bryan S. Amin
Bloomsbury

Subtitled "The Ultimate Guide to Saving Mankind from Vampires, Zombies, Hellhounds and other Mythical Beasts," this 200-plus page handbook catalogues monsters and the magical weapons used to kill them. Tedious and poorly illustrated, it's the latest release to ride the coattails of *The Zombie Survival Guide*. Even as a kid's book, the message is to kill what you don't understand (even Sasquatch?)—boo to that!



Dave Alexander

SMOTHERED DOLLS
A.R. Morlan

Overlook Collector
A few creepy yarns lurk among A.R. Morlan's first anthology of shorts, but the inclusion of a personal note after each story—detailing both her history of abuse and her dealings with the editors who rejected her work—is self-indulgent and overshadows the stories in this uneven collection. Only for the forgiving.
Justine Warwick



THE ART OF H.P. LOVECRAFT'S CTHULHU MYTHOS

Pet Morrison and Brian Wood, eds.
Fantasy Flight Games
Illustrating the unspeakable horrors of the Cthulhu mythos is no easy task, but the art departments of Chaosium and Fantasy Flight's role-playing games have been doing it for over 25 years. Packed with hauntingly gruesome artwork from more than 100 different artists, the tome will feed your tentacle-fetted Lovecraftian nightmares all night long.



Last Chance Lance



Grim Pictures: "Briar Rose" is compared to *Scream* in Walter Rankin's book

knowledge. He does, however, have the tendency to summarize fairy tales that have already been discussed earlier in the volume, making the book rather repetitive. It's as if Rankin compiled eight separate essays, then conjoined them haphazardly (with little editing) for publication. These are minor problems, however, given the superior writing.

Like the classic tales he examines, Rankin's book may very well be studied itself in years to come.

W. Brice McVicar

The Mammoth book of modern ghost stories

Peter Haining, ed.
Carroll & Graf

Whether it be those dreaded spooks coming to put the scare in Scrooge's step or the melancholy spectral creations of Edgar Allan Poe, the appeal of the literary ghost story has stood the test of time. But for the contemporary horror fan, *The Mammoth Book of Modern Ghost Stories* fails to cut the coffin lid. Celebrated British journalist and editor Peter Haining gathers over 40 tales that span the last hundred or so years from noteworthy 20th and 21st-century writers. He divides them into seven sec-

tions that may very well put you to sleep, as many of the contributors are just not well versed in horror and are writing in the genre for the first time.

However, the anthology is not a complete write off, as it has some redeeming tales, most of which are in the Festive Season Chillers section. Here, the reader is privy to stories from esteemed authors such as H. Rider Haggard (*King Solomon's Mines*) and Marjorie Bowen (*The Haunted Vintage*). Haggard's narrative "Only A Dream..." first published in 1905, is a macabre mystery about a young man visited by his gift-bearing dead first wife on the eve of his second marriage, while Bowen's Christmas-set "The Prescription" (1928) focuses on a doctor beckoned from the beyond to undo a horrific crime of passion. Both authors do a fine job of breathing life into their stories of the supernatural.

The other sections in this thick omnibus include Military Hauntings, The Modern Tradition, The "Golden" Era, Modern Gothic Tales, Tales of Unease and the more lighthearted Supernatural High Jinks, dedicated to spirits that make you sneaker.

While *The Mammoth Book of Modern Ghost Stories* is competently put together, its heavy use of tales by non-genre talent also means it lacks a certain horror authen-



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nd myself lying face up

**STEVEN HALL TESTS THE LITERARY WATERS WITH HIS EXPERIMENTAL
NEW BOOK, A GENRE-DEFYING NOVEL IN THE STYLE OF *HOUSE OF LEAVES*.**

The Amnesic Thrills of The Raw Shark Texts

BY LISA LADOUCEUR



Steven Hall did not set out to write the next great horror novel. In fact, quite the opposite. In his first book, *The Raw Shark Texts*—the story of a lovesick amnesiac hunted by a giant shark—he deliberately tears at the walls of genre convention, churning the thrills and chills with hallmarks ripped from adventure, sci-fi and mystery. It might even make you cry.

"The big idea behind the book was to answer the question, 'Is it possible to write something which would feel like a different book to every reader?'" says the 32-year-old Brit. "So if you happen to read horror fiction, you would find a horror story, but if you were interested in romance or thrillers, you'd find that kind of story. I wanted to see if I could balance the readers' interests with mine."

Hall's interests are varied indeed, from text-based conceptual art to superstring theories, but he loves scary stories too. The first novels he ever finished (around the age of 10) were Jules Verne's *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea* and Stephen King's *It*. These influences converge in spectacular fashion in *The Raw Shark Texts*, in which Hall's monster shark is a "conceptual" predator of unknown origin swimming in a vast sea of collective thoughts and fears. Or, it's *Memento* meets *The Matrix* meets *Jaws*, with more than a slight nod to Lovecraft.

In the beginning, Eric Sanderson wakes up, lying on the floor, chest heaving. Only he doesn't know he's Eric Sanderson, exactly—he's a blank slate in a room he doesn't recognize ("It isn't all coming back to me."). He quickly sets off trying to figure out just

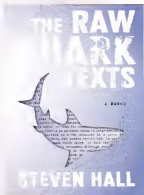
who he is, what happened to his memories and his girlfriend, and why he's being chased by a giant shark feeding on his memory and identity. There's a gargantuan list of other puzzles waiting, too, delivered in fragments of narrative, cryptic letters, codes, instruction booklets and, most striking, illustrations formed from text. When the shark attacks, the reader is an active participant, as each turn of a page brings the monster's image closer, larger, like a flip-book.

It sounds confusing but reading it isn't hard work, it's a pleasure. In fact, this is the most gripping mind-bendingly "experimental" horror title since Mark Z. Danielewski's *House of Leaves*. Hall bears that a lot.

"I was working with a lot of text-based art in university," he explains. "I started writing a book that would combine the two and was very excited that this hadn't really been done in a way that was really accessible. Then Mark's book came out and I thought, 'This guy is ten years ahead of me!' And so there was dismay, but also joy that I was on the right track."

Apart from *House of Leaves*, the biggest point of reference for *The Raw Shark Texts* is *Jaws*. When Eric ultimately confronts the shark, the climax recreates entire action sequences from the blockbuster film, with wounded characters literally bleeding words onto the page.

"*Jaws* was a big influence," Hall acknowledges. "When I was four or five, I refused to go paddling in the sea at Blackpool because I was afraid of sharks. Of course, Blackpool doesn't have sharks; it's so cold we barely have fish! In terms of bringing it into the book, I believe if you're going to write about, not just a shark but the idea of a



shark, you have to go to *Jaws*. To not do it would be a massive cop-out."

Since its UK release last spring, *The Raw Shark Texts* (out now in North America from HarperCollins) has spawned dozens of editions. No two are identical: Hall has created additional content for each territory, and left more fragments lurking online (playing games on rawsharkttexts.com unlocks annotated pages, etc.). In a book about a search for completeness, the most terrifying twist is that the author doesn't provide all the answers within its pages. Eric's memory recovery continues as long as the readers carry on investigating it. This real-life after-effect is the perfect complement to Hall's fictional examination of how one's identity is created—and destroyed—by those who connect with it.

"Underneath the horrific, the experimental and the adventure," says Hall, "it really is a small story about someone losing his girlfriend and trying to cope, to deal with the utter devastation that can bring on someone's mind."



IN AND DOWN
Brett Alexander Savory
Bottle & Glass

NO FURTHER MESSAGES
Brett Alexander Savory
Delirium Books

The world of Brett Savory is a dark, grimy side of town populated by damaged psyches, introspective killers, ugly truths and feigned sanity. With his handsome word choice and ear for dialogue, he is a brilliant narrator – switching seamlessly between genders and ages to incriminate effect – in both his short fiction (*No Further*

Messages) and his shape-shifting second novel *In and Down*.

The latter is the story of two young brothers living with their angry father and the whipsaws of a mother who abandoned the family. Stephen, seems like a bad seed who knows more than he lets on and Michael is missing something and suspects his father and brother may be plotting to kill him. Plagued by Melvill-Lynchlike dream states, Michael descends into a Lynchian mindfuck where characters switch identities and a spiritual guide named Hobo drink the Cat in the Hat on acid bikes him on a headtrip through dirty if mental sketches involving murderous clowns, pig bastards and a wooden out named Marta, who might just hold the answers.

A Gothic baroque with the same kind of murky, tawny whiney as *Percy Jackson*, *In and Down* sucks you in like a shadowy firm pair as Michael tries desperately to uncover the secrets behind his peculiar family.

Simulating the 21 books in *No Further Messages* make the fragility of the human mind, with a cavalcade of misused miscreants so exhilarating, you'll be hesitant to put it down for fear of prolonging where Savory's brain is headed next.

However, as imaginative and well written as Savory's work is, there's frustration in that, as a storyteller, he rarely offers any plot-related resolve, favouring mysterious ambiguity over a clever twist. While not everything needs to be spelled out, Savory might be holding his narrative cards a little too close to his chest, lessening the impact of intriguing stories that are immensely open to interpretation. Regardless, there's absolutely no denying the talent and depth of the exquisitely crafted worlds he creates. Both books are the work of a gifted writer bound to be a leading voice in the darkness of the Canadian literary landscape.

Trevor Tuminski

ticity. If you're the sort of reader that likes a more jolting, gruesome or all-out terrifying read, then this anthology is best left alone. However, if you take great pleasure in exploring the gentler highways and byways of yesteryear fear, then by all means give Haining's book a look. In fact, you can have this copy!

Samantha Tyndall

The Devil's nose
Brom
Abrams

The storybook may be regarded as the domain of children's literature, but thankfully, someone occasionally dares to challenge that stereotype. Brom did it in 2005 with *Plucker* (RMH54), a horrifically realized, illustrated fairy tale for adults. Now, the established artist and illustrator returns to the storybook format with a second vicious tale for grown-ups: *The Devil's Rose*.

In it, a group of damned souls escapes from Hell, chased by another one who's been tasked with capturing and returning them. The story begins just as the escapees lay siege on a group of campers, bathing in and drinking their victims' blood in order to make their trail less traceable to the one sent to hunt them. That man, Cole, has made a deal with the devil (or rather, with one of many devils – Brom's vision of Hell is both complex and intriguing). If he returns the souls of the escapees and their unusual ringleader, he will be released from his obligations to underworld, leaving him free to search for his long-lost love, Rose, whom he betrayed mere hours before her death and has carried guilt over ever since.

A fluid western/biblical horror hybrid, *The Devil's Rose* brims with reanimated corpses, Hell beasts (which take the form of some seriously creepy stallions), fire demons and severed heads – many of which are captured in the oversized hardcover's glorious full-colour illustrations.

Perhaps the biggest drawback of the storybook medium is its restrictive length. *The Devil's Rose* clocks in at just over 110 pages – a mammoth undertaking as far as storybooks go, but only a mere novella in horror fiction terms. Because the scope of this tale is so much larger than that of *Plucker*, one can't help but feel disappointed that ends so quickly. Brom's imaginative envisioning of the hierarchies of Hell alone practically demands more stories set in this universe. If there was one other outcrop to be had about *The Devil's Rose*, it's that in a book this beautiful, the few typesetting issues really stick out sorely. But that still doesn't diminish the absolute treat that this is. Recommended for macabre art lovers and horror fiction fans alike.

Monica S. Kuebler





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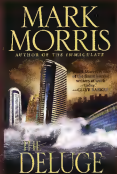
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WARNING!

TRAVELOGUE OF TERROR

Ohio State Reformatory - Mansfield, Ohio

by Lisa Ladouceur
photography by Gillian Holmes



Mansfield is a ghost town. Oh, there are people living here, in the middle of Ohio between Cleveland and Columbus - about 50,000 of them. But even though the power's still on, Main Street feels abandoned. Arriving on a Sunday afternoon, I drive past row after row of colourful Victorian mansions, once grand but now faded like the paint peeling off their verandas. At the Carousel Park, lonely wooden horses wait for riders, and there are plenty of parking spaces in the town square.

The haunted vibe suits my mission: a trip to the Ohio State Reformatory, Mansfield's abandoned state penitentiary. It was made famous to film viewers in the 1990s as the set for *The Shawshank Redemption*. But for a century before that, its prisoners - alive and dead - made it infamous.

You have to be careful visiting this place. Its remains sit next to Mansfield's current prison, and if you pull into the wrong driveway, you're liable to attract some unwanted attention from the heavily armed guards. Thankfully, OSR (as the locals call it) looms large on Reformatory Road, 25,000 square feet of granite shaped into an imposing Gothic castle. From afar, you could almost mistake it for a resort hotel.

Despite the attractive architecture, few chose to stay here. Opened in 1896 primarily as a rehabilitation centre for young men, it became increasingly overcrowded with hardened criminals. Murder, suicide and riots occurred at regular intervals, until the 1970s when a federal lawsuit decried its "brutalizing and inhumane conditions" and demanded it be shut down. The prison closed in 1980 and was destined for demolition, but The Mansfield Reformatory Preservation Society was quickly created to save the heritage building. They've been opening it up to film crews and tourists ever since.

Admission is by guided tour only, and the best time to visit is on Sunday, when you can choose from three different one-hour walks. I select the Hollywood Tour, which promises to show off locations from *Shawshank*, *Air Force One* and the solitary confinement "hole." Our guide, Bob, is a real talker. He knows all the *Shawshank* trivia, and shares plenty of old prison tales gleaned from former inmates who've taken his tours. We get to see the rooms used in the film for the warden's office and the parole board hearings, unchanged since *Shawshank* director Frank Darabont and his crew struck their sets in 1984. (Well, except for the sets, they took that with them.) In fact, the whole building is a time machine: a labyrinth of narrow staircases leading to dusty hallways, remnants of tiles and wallpaper in the style of decades past. As we are warned several times, we're surrounded by decaying lead paints. The long-neglected walls shed their sombre grey and blue, like the skin of a fresh corpse. The Society is restoring it slowly, although most visitors like it crumbling.

One area has been beautifully renovated: a high-ceiling room located between the East and West cellblocks. Formerly used as the prisoners' visitors' area, it was transformed into a Russian prison for the shooting of *Air Force One*. (A portrait of Stalin is still painted on the gunmetal grey

walls.) It's bright and not at all creepy; locals rent it out for weddings and other receptions.

The cellblocks are not nearly as welcoming, however.

The Reformatory boasts the world's largest free-standing steel cellblock - six stories, 600 cells. That's just one of them. Between the East and West blocks, these cramped quarters once housed up to 5000 men. Eagerly, we all step inside and pose for jailbird snaps. You can still smell the men's desperate existence drifting out of the dingy rooms. Or perhaps it's something else in the air. According to the staff, the Reformatory still holds inmates: the ghosts of prisoners past.

As a haunted hot spot, OSR attracts its share of ghost hunters, so the Society has introduced a limited schedule of nighttime Ghost Walk tours. Of course, I sign up. Whether or not one believes in paranormal happenings, the opportunity to wander these abandoned ruins after hours is too special to pass up.

Returning after dark, I'm greeted by a new crew of volunteers, the ghost-hunting experts. We are a dozen visitors, equipped with cameras, tape recorders, flashlights. For two hours we shall be led through the entire facility, from its bowels to its guard towers, hearing campfire-worthy stories of prison deaths and spectral sightings. We might see a former warden's wife floating around, apparently: she shot herself here.

It is completely black and the group needs little encouragement to stick together. Our hosts point out particular corners or doorways where ghostly activities are said to frequently occur. One guest says his camera is taking pictures all on its own. Another claims to have captured an orb on her digital. I feel nothing out of the ordinary but the chill of loneliness, one body being swallowed by the vast space. In this dimmest of light, the corroding metal bars appear ghostly green, like underwater wreckage. Rooms that seemed like quaint exhibits in daylight are now filled with sharp, sinister shadows.

The Ghost Walk tours cover more of the prison than any other; we get to see the former chapel,



MANSFIELD MEMORIES

Imagine walking into the attic of a long-forgotten building and finding a treasure trove of ancient artifacts. It happened in Mansfield, where a lifetime of oddities collected by local Edward Wilkinson (who supplied the Smithsonian, the Peabody and the Carnegie museums in his heyday) was neglected for decades. Thankfully, his collection has been recovered and the 1860's building reopened as the Mansfield Memorial Museum. It's worth a detour to downtown just to visit Mansfield's original school or 19th-century zoomorphic animals — taxidermied ducks enjoying tea time, a rat jazz band, etc. — and many other stuffed wonders of natural history all displayed in Victorian-era glass cases in a gorgeous second-story room with vaulted ceilings. Temporary exhibits fill the main floor; we got the Westinghouse Robots exhibit, an enlightening display featuring Elektro, the world's first voice-activated robot who could walk, talk and smoke! Built in Mansfield, Elektro was a star at the 1939 World's Fair and in the 1950s B-flick *Sex Kittens Go to College*. See what the papers of the time called "the friendly Frankenstein."

Mansfield Memorial Museum is located on 34 Park Avenue West, Mansfield. It is open Wednesday through Sunday 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. by donation. mansfieldmuseum.org.



The Strange House on Reformatory Road; (top) The East Cell Block at night (bottom, left to right) the East Cell Block during the day and the interior of a cell. (Opposite) The Ohio State Reformatory, and an inmate U.S. card.

perhaps the spookiest space here, and climb the twisting staircase to the rooftop tower, from where you can see the old prison cemetery, as well as the new prison next door. We learn that a full overnight tour is also offered and I try to imagine wandering unsupervised in these halls from dusk 'til dawn. Our tour is already an extensive walk-about, but the two hours pass too quickly, and soon we are shuffled out into the night, left to wonder not only about those who were once imprisoned here but about who still walks within.

The Ohio State Reformatory is located at 100 Reformatory Road, Mansfield, Ohio and is open seasonally from May to October. Daily tours at 2 p.m. Tuesday to Friday. Three Sunday tours are available from 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. \$3.00 adults \$6.00 children 7 and up. A special haunted attraction is presented each Halloween weekend. Limited tickets for Ghost Walk and Ghost Hunt tours sell out months in advance and can be reserved online at myps.org.



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THE GORE-MET

MENU

The Gore-Met worships at the altar of *Hellraiser*.

CLIVE BARKER'S *HELLRAISER* 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

Starring Andrew Robinson, Clare Higgins
and Ashley Lawrence
Written and Directed by Clive Barker
Anchor Bay

Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) redefined the modern horror film and is rightly regarded as the definitive masterpiece of the decade. Hitchcock eschewed the mad scientists and atomic insects of the '50s for down-home psychological thrills inspired by the real-life mother fixation of notorious necrophile Ed Gein.

In the '70s, William Friedkin's box office smash *The Exorcist* (1973) expanded on the notion that home is where the horror is. Although awash in Catholic theology, the true root of the fear in the film is decidedly non-demonological, stemming from the ostensible illness of a child.

These films are distinguished by a dead serious approach to the subject matter and serve as rare examples of strictly adult-oriented horror. Extrapolating these criteria, Clive Barker's *Hellraiser* (1987), a film in which the crus is an unhappy marriage, stands as the epitome of the effects-driven splatter aesthetic of the '80s.

Barker retooled his novella *The Hellbound Heart* for his feature film debut. In the prologue, Frank Cotton (Sean Chapman), a petty criminal in pursuit of the ultimate sexual thrill, buys a mysterious puzzle box known as the Lament Configuration. Ensnared in a barren room in the Cotton family home, he opens it. Hooks shoot out into his flesh. The room is transformed into a gore-splattered abattoir while artfully mutilated, sadomasochistic demons known as Cenobites gather up pieces of Frank's face.

Later, Frank's mild-mannered brother Larry (Andrew Robinson) and his new wife Julia (Clare Higgins) move into the house. Julia is filled with regret and pines for the illicit sexual affair she had



with Frank. When Larry cuts his hand badly and stumbles into the room in which Frank died, his dripping blood brings Frank back from Hell in a gruesome, skinless state. Julia then helps Frank reconstitute his physical form by trolling for men in bars and luring them back to the house with promises of sex, only to smash their skulls in with a hammer so Frank can work his fleshless fingers into their bodies and absorb their life essence. When Larry's daughter Kristie (Ashley Lawrence) catches Julia and Frank in the act of murder, she barely escapes with her life – and the puzzle box. She inadvertently summons the demonic Cenobites, who agree to spare her soul in exchange for the one that escaped them.

Twenty years ago, before an interminable slew of shitty sequels, Barker's low-budget independent film was a welcome breath of fetid, sulfurous air in a genre that was suffocating beneath a cloud of horror comedies and slasher sequels. This new DVD reassesses the startling originality of Barker's vision.

Anchor Bay released *Hellraiser* in an excellent limited edition collectible tin in 2000, bundled with *Hellraiser 2: Hellbound* as a bonus. This single-disc 20th Anniversary Edition represents a

substantial upgrade, however, with a new, significantly higher bit-rate transfer that is both more vivid and less grainy. But where this new version really shines is in the extras.

The supplements from the tin – with the exception of the stills gallery – are carried over, specifically the commentary track with Barker and star Lawrence, the *Resurrection* featurette (also with improved image quality) and the original US theatrical trailer, with the addition of six trailers and TV spots and four new (crappy) stills galleries. But the real selling points of this new release are four exclusive interviews.

Andrew Robinson (*Mr. Cotton, I Presume*), Ashley Lawrence (*Actress from Hell*), Christopher Young (*Hellcomposer*) and Doug Bradley (*Under the Skin*) provide an extra hour of entertaining insight into the *Hellraiser* legacy, with Robinson's segment standing out as about the most frank and engaging interview ever included on a DVD.

This is the definitive release of the greatest horror film of the '80s and demonstrates that Anchor Bay has finally figured out how to sell the same films to the same customers – improve on them. Whether a blind purchase or a double-dip, buy it or I'll tear your soul apart!

Aw, come on, you knew that was coming.... **B**



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AUDIO DROME

REVIEWS BY KEITH CARMAN, MARK R. HASAN, JASON LAPEYRE, AND
AARON VON LUPTON



28 WEEKS LATER

Soundtrack

John Murphy

Fox Music
John Murphy's minimalist, semi-nihilistic theme from *28 Days Later* is once again central in his score for the sequel to Danny Boyle's 2002 zombie thriller. Like he did for Boyle's *Sunshine*, Murphy sticks with his fusion of orchestral samples, acoustic sounds, electronic tones and percussion for *28 Weeks Later*, creating wordily intimate music for a post-apocalyptic world where technology can't save mankind. Sampled voices, delicate keyboards and acoustic guitar are the emotional anchors, while long streams of washed-out tones, distorted electric guitar and minimalist themes remind us of the disorienting technological comforts and safeguards. Murphy avoids bombast and sonic overload (electric guitar and drums excepted) in favour of wailing moods, making this a sublimely bleak album (available only from iTunes) that'll transform any sunny dawn into a doom-laden nightfall. **MRH *******



D-WAR/Dragon Wars

Soundtrack

Steve Jablonsky

Mulan/SONY

If you ignore the hideously clichéd heroic and quasi-Asian cues that bookend this Korean CD, *D-War* offers an enjoyable blend of animated action cues which indirectly pay tribute to the grand, menacing scores of classic Asian

monster flicks. Composer Steve Jablonsky treats the characters and tragedy with modest sincerity, applying lovely chorales, sweeping harmonies and the usual ominous bass-booms, but it's clear the quotations of the ancient and ever-popular *Dies irae* liturgy are cheeky pokes at a melodramatic opus about a world poised to meet an apocalyptic end. "Burakili" grabs every orchestral element – percussion, vocals, brass fanfares – but manages to straddle a fine line between sincerity and bombast, proving Jablonsky is very comfortable writing for a large orchestra, something he hasn't been able to do with such force amid his recent remakes scores (*Amityville Horror*, *The Hitcher*, *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*). An overblown guilty pleasure. **MRH *******



STEVE MOORE

The Henge

Relapse Records

Best known as one-half of Italian horror score-influenced outfit *Zombi*, Steve Moore embarks on a solo career with *The Henge* and, thankfully, the journey has not taken him far from his nightmarish roots. Still heavily influenced by John Carpenter and Tangerine Dream, on *The Henge* he expands *Zombi*'s sound with droning soundscapes ("Introduction"), bottom-heavy beats ("Infinite Resignation"), pulse-pounding rhythms that could be taken from a slasher film chase sequence ("The Henge/Ascension"), brooding gothic keyboards ("Dead Tide") and a trance-y number ("Cephed"). The use of metal guitar and occasional dance club friendliness makes this a some-

what less atmospheric experience than Moore's previous work, but there's still plenty of frightening material to be had. Though it's cliché to say, *The Henge* is not a collection of songs but something to experience as a whole – preferably alone in a dark room, or a desolate stretch of midnight highway. **AVL *******



JUICEHEAD

The Devil Made Me Do It

Misery Records

The most recent addition to the Misfits Records mortuary seems like a bit of a strange choice, given that not only is Juicehead not part of the Misfits family, but the band has absolutely nothing to do with horror, save for some cool album artwork by monster fetish man

Dave Burke (who did *Rat Fink* Comix covers in the mid-'90s and designed the Misfits' 30th Anniversary logo). Juicehead is in fact a fairly unremarkable sounding low-fi punk band, combining old school production values and socio-political lyrics with a formulaic mid-'90s melodic style that lacks spark. They're not terrible, but when you only have a few bands on your roster, why make such a forgettable group the next big addition? **AVL ***



NECRO

Death Rap

Psych+Logical

For a few years now, Necro's been talking about how he invented the subgenre he calls Death Rap. And here it is: brutal rhymes over death

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THE LAST WINTER

Jeff Grace/Anton Sanko

MovieScore Media

Awash in cold desperation, Larry Fessenden's low-key eco-thriller is paired with a sometimes regal orchestral score, chiefly performed by the renowned Flux Quartet chamber orchestra. With the exception of Anton Sanko's handful of electronic ambient cues, Jeff Grace wrote the bulk of the score, which shifts fluidly between delicate themes and Grace's confident interweaving of sustained dissonance, reminiscent of his more experimental and terrifying *Roost* score. Sanko's expansive, haunting soundscapes organically co-exist with Grace's more discretionary electronics and chilling orchestral cues. His pulsating five-note piano motif forms the score's multi-purpose tragic/meditative theme, and while somewhat overused in the album's first half, it doesn't reduce the composers' superb portrait of arctic isolation and desperate souls slowly falling victim to a seething menace. **MRH *******

MEET DANIEL LIGHT.
COMPOSER FOR THE HIT
SERIAL KILLER-COP SHOW.

The Lighter Side of
DEXTER

Maintaining a dual life as a blood-spatter expert for the Miami police department as well as methodical serial killer, the title character of Showtime's *Dexter* is a study in opposites — embraced by fans of the show for his whimsical musings on his own dark nature. Daniel Licht's music — now available on CD from Milan and as an extended iTunes album — is tailor-made for the show's gruesome sense of humour.

"*Dexter* in a lot of ways touches upon the many directions that my career has gone," says Licht. "I did start in the thriller-horror genre, and I sort of managed to arc and end up doing comedy."

Licht transcended B-flicks (including sequels to *The Amityville Horror* and *Children of the Corn*) with his strong grasp of melody and drama, going on to score lighter television fare.

The darkly comedic tone of each *Dexter* episode is ignited by a brilliant theme composed by Rolfe Kent (*Sideways*), but Licht was free to develop his own material. "I think [the producers] saw it as a separate item; it's like a set piece that you put on a minute, but it's not a playing piece, if you know what I mean."

Tasked with crafting a functional underscore for each episode, Licht stayed with Kent's ensemble sound and use of exotic instruments, including a bouzouki. He also chose to play most

of the main instruments himself, intimately capturing the fine nuances of specific performances via blues guitar, various flutes and string bass, or building tension for suspense montages through heavy percussion tracks and electronica. His use of acoustic guitar also makes *Dexter* a tragic figure — which is key to understanding the mentally scarred anti-hero.

Licht could glean plot details from the series writers to form his own musical arcs, but the composer chooses to score *Dexter* with a certain blissful innocence.

"I didn't ask the producers how the season would end. I'm working on Season 2 right now, and I don't know how it'll end, and I don't want to know."

Mark R. Hassan



metal thrashers by some of his favourite metal artists. The fusion experiment doesn't extend to the whole album, though, which ranges from the straight rap of first single "Mutate the Beast" to Necro's double-time rapping over a metal super group, comprised of members of Suffocation, Death, Lamb of God and Shadow's Fall, on "Suffocated to Death by God's Shadow" (get it?). It's dark, it's Satanic, it's gory, it's repulsive, it's... just like his other records. And that's a good thing for Necro fans, as he maintains his genius for violent imagery and morbid beats. Recommended if you're down with the sickness: JL

3.5/5/2



DENIAL FIEND

They Rise

lex Moon

Featuring an extreme music all-star cast — group members have served time in Six Feet Under, Death, Massacre and Nasty Savage — it's no surprise that Denial Fiend's zombie-devoted debut shreds. A furious bout of thrash-influenced death metal, this rumbling juggernaut unites the low-end garble of Cannibal Corpse with Entombed's chugging riffs. Tunes such as "Return to the Tombs of the Cursed Blind Dead," "Pipped Inside Out" and the title track provide haunting warnings to potential victims and gory tributes to the undead while hammering out a mid-paced groove. However, Denial Fiend's pedigree,

Metal

heaviness and connections with punkers Down By Law and Pseudo Heroes, doesn't stop the group from throwing in some catchy chant-alongs reminiscent of American Psycho-era Misfits. The end result is an album with a fresh musical thrust behind more standard lyrical fare. KC 3.5/5



PENTACLE

Under the Black Cross

lex Moon

Some bands purport evilness while others are just outright evil. Pentacle fit into the latter category, as *Under the Black Cross* proves with a single shrieking blast. It's raucous death metal that blends liturgical's growing vocal attack with technical riffing that skips just short of feeling mechanical. It means that *Under the Black Cross* is as imposing and terror-inducing as one would expect from dudes clad in leather and sherry, pointy things. Stylistically, the band maximizes black metal's moroseness, but they've clearly been raised on the Tampa Bay death sound and prefer a little more night-marish creep with their lyrical attack — tracks "Into the Fiery Jaws," "Awaiting the Blast of Death" and a cover of Necrovere's "Divus de Mortuus" discuss such line topics as such as being charred and tortured. It's enjoyable, but after six songs you want them to drop the "I'm so scary" and just hammer out another Celtic Frost-ish sonic monolith. KC 3.5/5

Metal

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SOUNDTRACK
TO THE

Metacocalypse

BY KEITH CARMAN

The concept is as ludicrous as it is successful: a cartoon revolving around five gore-obsessed meatheads who have become the world's biggest band—the extreme metal outfit Dethklok. Yet, thanks to the talents of creators Brandon Small and Tommy Blacha, *Metacocalypse* enters its second season as one of the Cartoon Network's biggest hits.

Enthusiasts—metal or otherwise—have become addicted to the folk of vocalist Nathan Explosion, guitarists Skwisgär Skwigert and Toki Wartooth, bassist William Murderface and drummer Pickles as they bumble their way towards world domination via “brutal” heavy metal.

According to 32-year-old Small—a comedian who, like Blacha, has experience writing for a variety of both live-action and animated shows—we have the eloquent musings of gorecore originators *Cannibal Corpse* to thank for it all.

“*[Metacocalypse]* started as a stage skit with us doing the singer of *Cannibal Corpse* appearing in *Glegarry Glen Ross*,” he reveals. “We loved doing it so we just tweaked it into a full-on show. The original pitch was just me telling [the investor]: ‘I have a great plan for a show about an extreme

metal band. Half of them are from Scandinavia and half from the US. You can’t understand what anyone says but there will be murder and comedy.’ He said, ‘That sounds great—green light.’”

In a black nutshell, *Metacocalypse* sees the alcohol-fueled outfit touring the world and trying to produce the most brutal music ever made, while juggling endorsement deals and dodging attempts by a secret global faction to destroy them. The series pokes fun at metal clichés but with a sincerity that has garnered the adoration of such metal heavyweights as King Diamond, members of Arch Enemy, Metallica and Exodus, all of whom have lent their vocal abilities to the cause.

To complement the show, Dethklok released the disc *Dethalbum (Wam-er/Adult Swim)*. Small writes all of the songs, sings, plays guitar, bass and keyboards, while Gene Hoglan (*Dark Angel*, *Death*, *Strapping Young Lad*) does duty as drummer. The CD has already outsold many of the world’s most renowned metal acts on the strength of tracks such as “Murmaider,” “Bloodcrusted” and “Go Forth And Die.” (There is also a special edition of the album that features extra content.) In addition, the “band” even went on tour recently, with Small and Hoglan joined by guitarist Mike Kenesly and bassist Bryan Baker, both of whom also play with *Steve Vai*.

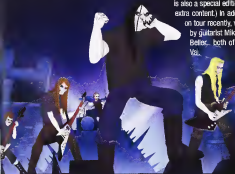
Small admits that between writing plots, recording “Dethtracks” and voicing characters, the most entertaining aspect of *Metacocalypse* is still quite simply the unending wealth of explicit—and oft unintentional—brutality unleashed.

“We’re constantly coming up with new, gory fan mutilation scenes,” he says, chuckling. “We pass [ideas] around the room, asking, ‘What’s the new way to kill a guy?’ We try to top each other and find new ways to mutilate, murder and kill our characters. Even with the subtle elements, we wonder, ‘Is it too stupid?’ We had a four-hour conversation about a background joke where one

Dethklok employee falls off a scaffold and gets impaled.”

For those keeping track of the body count, during the show’s first season Dethklok accidentally killed their chef when he was launched into helicopter blades (they subsequently sewed him back together improperly), a would-be assassin ventilated his head by filling on a diamond-crusted coddie, the band crushed and scalped an audience when they dropped a metal box on them that contained hot coffee, and a lake troll they accidentally invoked levelled Finland. While these events are fodder for amusing Dethklok songs, Small notes that there’s point to all the mayhem.

“Metal is about brutality,” he states. “Going to the dentist is brutal. Forgetting your wallet is brutal. Paying taxes? The ultimate brutality! I just worked for this money and now I have to give it to you? That’s tricky, and it’s brutal! We do get extreme at some points, but this show—and Dethklok’s songs—are about regular brutality in day-to-day life. The song ‘Birthday Dethday’ follows the idea that every day you’re aging and getting older, turning into an old fucking mutant. It’s universal but it’s brutal. ‘Briefcase Full of Guts’ is simple: work sucks. We channel that frustration of life through something we love: extreme metal.” ☛





PLAY DEAD



GRAPHICS



PLAYABILITY



SHIVERS

HIGHEST RATING IS THREE.

GAMES REVIEWED BY ANDREW LEE



BLACKSITE: AREA 51

PC, PS3, Xbox 360

Midway

It's inevitable: the aliens are gonna come some time soon and kick our skinny human asses. If you want to see what it might look like before it actually happens, grab this title and prepare for the day they try to pull your larynx through your sphincter.

Assuming the role of a grizzled Iraq war hero, players move into the famed Nevada military base that doesn't officially exist: Area 51. Here you come face-to-face with some hostile ETs who want to do a whole lot more than phone home. You'll often find yourself manning a mini-gun on a

helicopter gunship or firing from the back of a Hummer as you skrimish through amazingly rendered photo-realistic environments, such as a winding canyon road or a trashy trailer park. Weaponry may be standard military hardware but battle is definitely not limited to the type of squad tactics you might be familiar with in games like *Ghost Recon* or *Halo 2*, as *Blacksite* also enables players to order airstrikes from nearby gunships.

Most of the aliens are reminiscent of the creatures from *Independence Day*—they're scary, loud and definitely won't be chucking candy at you. There are also genetically modified humans in mechanized battle suits and colossal armored dragons with gigantic tentacles that spit acid and will seriously fuck up your weekend plans.

Blacksite: Area 51 is a splatter-filled game that never lets up on spraying the red stuff (mostly yours) all over the place. With an epic soundtrack, multi-player online capability and huge replay value, it'll have you anticipating the real invasion with bated breath.



ARKHAM HORROR: THE KING IN YELLOW

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Arkham Asylum Games

Just when you thought you had rid your beloved town of Arkham of every last vestige of Cthulhu, another desecrated threat arrives: a new playset at Miskatonic University called *The King in Yellow* has garnered mixed reviews from fansite, where it just wrapped—it seems that anybody who watches it goes inexplicably insane.

Meant to be played with the original *Arkham Horror* game (RM754), it sees players in the role of investigators desperately trying to stop the play from finishing its third act, which will send the residents of the town into a murderous riot. Among the 100 superbly illustrated cards are new locales (including the Bank of Arkham and the infamous Watch House), plagues of slugs and other unspeakable monsters, plus a smorgasbord of new spells and magical abilities.

Whether played on its own or with a larger game in progress, two big tentacles up for *The King in Yellow*.



MR. JACK

Board Game

Alibi Games

The foggy streets of London are wet and cool. At your feet lies the excruciated body of another murdered prostitute. Jack the Ripper has struck again. In *Mr. Jack* two players control a group of detectives, including Sherlock Holmes, who are hot on the trail of the famous killer. Unbeknownst to them, however, one amongst them is the murderer.

The gaming board is a wonderful representation of the famed Whitechapel district of London and is divided into areas of darkness and those lit by gaslight. Players take turns moving the detectives in and out of the darkness and the play or in charge of the Ripper lets the lead investigator know if the killer is visible or not. Before eight turns are up, the investigator must eliminate suspects to reveal the killer.

With rounds that run roughly 30 minutes, *Mr. Jack* has a lot of replay value. Invite Watson over for a game today.

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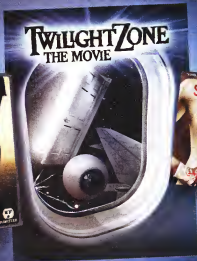
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Classic Cut Presents

MAN BITES DOG



Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel and Benoît Poelvoorde
Belgium - 1992

A watershed year for intelligent, violent thrillers, 1992 saw the release of Abel Ferrara's *Bad Lieutenant*, his masterpiece of human depravity, Michael Haneke explored the results of a generation raised on violent home entertainment in *Benny's Video*, and Quentin Tarantino went from film geek to exploitation auteur with *Reservoir Dogs*. Yet, the most disturbing examination of violence released that year was a Belgian film directed by a trio of recent film school graduates: *Man Bites Dog*, the only one of these titles grim enough to qualify as a horror movie and, oddly, also the funniest.

The three-headed writing/directing team behind the film - Rémy Belvaux, André Bonzel and Benoît Poelvoorde - had only a single short film to their name (the espionage/adventure parody *Pas De Côté Pour Daniel* Daniel) when they embarked on the production of *Man Bites Dog*. The film was produced for a minuscule budget of \$100,000 over a period of two-and-a-half years and would go on to become the highest grossing film ever made in Belgium. It earned equal amounts of adoration and condemnation on the festival circuit, picking up awards at Cannes, the Catalonian International Film Festival (Sitges) and the Toronto International Film Festival, but it also saw walkouts at public screenings. The director of the Tokyo Film Festival was even fired for booking the movie (before it was banned in Japan). In addition, the film's original poster (pictured) was also censored, the soother replaced with a pair of dentures.

Why the outrage? Certainly the film features graphic content, but nothing that hadn't been seen before. Perhaps audiences were so disturbed because the filmmakers implicated themselves and the audience in the crimes committed onscreen. *Man Bites Dog* is a mockumentary following the day-to-day life of a serial killer (memorably portrayed by Poelvoorde). Early in the film, he's presented as an eddy charismatic character pitched somewhere between Hannibal Lecter and a standup comedian. Sure, he kills a few people, but the general tone is that of a dark Christopher Guest movie. As the film progresses, though, it becomes more disturbing. The killer starts funding the movie himself and asking the filmmakers to assist him in his crimes. At first they perform menial tasks, such as carrying bodies, but soon they become directly involved in the brutal murders. Violence that was once ironic and funny is now painfully real and unbearably disturbing, as if to punish the audience for enjoying the ironic humour of the early sequences. It culminates in a brutal rape and murder involv-

ing the filmmakers (played by Belvaux and Bonzel) that is so shocking it was drastically cut for the American theatrical release to avoid an NC-17 rating. However as gruesome as the scene may be, it is by no means gratuitous. It's the moment the directors have been building towards.

The horrific third act of *Man Bites Dog* critiques the cinematic representation of violence. By exploiting violence for entertainment, filmmakers and audiences trivialize the darkest side of human nature. Belvaux, Bonzel and Poelvoorde, do so in the early sequences of *Man Bites Dog* only to deliberately pull the rug out from under viewers' feet. The approach was ahead of its time, predating the Tarantino-influenced use of ironic violence that defined filmmaking later in the '90s. Similarly, the film also examines the ethical implications of documentary filmmakers becoming involved with their subjects at a time that predated the influx of reality television (although Belvaux did state that the pioneering reality TV series *Cops* was a significant influence on the movie).

In terms of the genre, *Man Bites Dog* essentially invented the mockumentary-horror subgenre. While *Cannibal Holocaust* came first in 1980, it's impossible to imagine such titles as *The Blair Witch Project* (which practically lifts its concluding moments from *MBD*), *The Last Broadcast*, *Behind the Mask* and *Romero's Diary of the Dead* without it. On *Man Bites Dog*'s tenth anniversary, it was officially recognized as a classic with the release of a deluxe Criterion version of the film.

Despite the strength and influence of the film, though, *Man Bites Dog*'s creators sadly never managed to match its success. Benoît Poelvoorde fared the best, finding a career as a comic actor in France; André Bonzel disappeared before reemerging as a cinematographer in recent years, and Rémy Belvaux's greatest accomplishment since his cinematic debut was throwing a pie in Bill Gates' face, as a prank, in 1996. The trio never completed a sophomore effort, and after Belvaux's suicide last year they never will. That said, a debut as accomplished as *Man Bites Dog* would be hard for anyone to top.

Philip Brown



Man Bites Dog: Pioneering reality-style violence sparked controversy.

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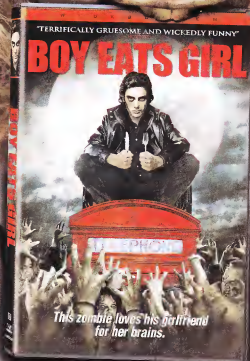
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